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THE OEDIPUS TRADITION IN EUROPEAN DRAMA



by

MARIE-ANNE PAULY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1971

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled "The Oedipus Tradition in European Drama" submitted by Marie-Anne Pauly in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date.....*Sept 13/76*.....

ABSTRACT

The Oedipus myth has attracted writers of all ages, and particularly the twentieth century. But its tradition can only be appreciated against the background of the most important earlier treatments. Thus it seemed necessary to consider first the Greek tragedies, in particular Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus with its wide variety of possible interpretations, and also the Oedipus at Colonus and the Phoenissae by Euripides.

In later versions the most characteristic changes have been pointed out and put into relation to the author and his time. Seneca's Oedipus intended for recitation is written in a completely different mood, where the influence of Etruscan religion is seen in long scenes of sacrifices and necromancy. In the Middle Ages the tradition was kept alive through the epics, and with the Renaissance the interest in the dramatic perfection of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus was revived. The tragedies by Corneille, Dryden, and Voltaire are characterized on the one hand by the imitation of the Greek model, and on the other by the addition of love intrigues. Oedipus' destiny alone was not thought to provide sufficient material for their audiences.

In the 19th century the interest in Greek tragedy itself was revived once more, and for the Oedipus reinterpretations the stage performances of the ancient tragedies as well as Nietzsche's new approach in Die Geburt der Tragödie appear to be particularly significant. This influence can be seen in the early works of this century. Péladan's Oedipe et le Sphinx is characteristic for the revival of tragedy at the turning of the century, and it also contains Péladan's own convictions on the importance of willpower and the symbolic meaning of the sphinx. This dramatic presentation of Oedipus' life before the anagnorisis was taken up by Hugo von

Hofmannsthal, too, in Oedipus und die Sphinx; this play has to be considered in the context of his other works and his attitude toward Antiquity. Rudolf Pannwitz' somewhat strange reinterpretation of Oedipus at Colonus is an almost literal development of Nietzsche's theories on the Dionysian aspect of tragedy. His interest in the myth is confirmed by a nondramatic prose work, Thebais, written fifty years later, where the destiny of Oedipus is presented through the eyes of Tiresias.

After the First World War several famous French reinterpretations were written. In André Gide's Oedipe, Jean Cocteau's La Machine infernale, and Henri Ghéon's Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux, the relation to the tradition and above all the symbolic meaning of the sphinx differently interpreted by 20th century writers has been stressed. A less well known work, A. Curvers' satyr play, Ce vieil Oedipe, presents traditional attitudes and literary treatments in the style of Aristophanic comedy.

A last important play is T.S. Eliot's reinterpretation of the Oedipus at Colonus in The Elder Statesman which is entirely taken out of the mythic background into a contemporary setting.

Through the variety of attitudes toward the destiny of Oedipus, the myth becomes an interesting document of the literary tastes and ideological outlooks of different ages, countries, and above all of personal interpretations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Walter H. Johns for his interest and his important help in the completion of this thesis, and the other members of my committee for their advice.

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PREFACE

For a long time the study of themes, such as those based on a mythological figure like Oedipus, was not highly thought of by the leading scholars of comparative literature, but this attitude has been changed in recent years mainly through the efforts of E. Frenzel and R. Trousson.¹ The necessity of establishing the continuity in the tradition of a literary theme by including as far as possible all its treatments, has been stressed. Such an approach to the Oedipus theme is far beyond the scope of this thesis where I am mainly dealing with 20th century interpretations; yet it showed me the necessity of a survey of important earlier works, in particular the Greek and Latin tragedies which have remained the primary source for any further adaptation.²

The influence of ancient myth on contemporary literature, in particular drama, is a well-known phenomenon that has not been ignored by critics.³ Some consider it as a natural continuation of the influence of the classics in the Western world and study the movement either in its international context, or as a national development. Among the studies on the interpretation of individual figures Oedipus has not been ignored, and the importance of the

¹E. Frenzel, Stoff- und Motivgeschichte. (Berlin: E. Schmidt Verlag, 1956); R. Trousson, Un Problème de littérature comparée: les études de thèmes. (Paris: Minard, 1965).

²Cf. G. Highet, The Classical Tradition in Western Literature (1949; rpt. Oxford: University Press, 1967); W. Schade-waldt, Hellas und Hesperiden (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1960); P. Albouy, Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française (Paris: Colin, 1969).

³L. Díez del Corral, La Funcion del Mito Clasico en la Literatura Contemporanea (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1957).

myth in the most famous adaptations of Sophocles' tragedy is analyzed by a few critics; sometimes these works are seen in connection with the writers' general use of myth.⁴ Comparative studies of various treatments of one myth are often very selective, opposing only the best known adaptations, and they are generally restricted to the modern works of one national literature,⁵ though some attempt a more international approach.⁶

Rather than giving a very detailed study of a few famous Oedipus adaptations in this century, it seemed preferable to put the emphasis on the large variety of approaches in several European literatures including thus less well known works, dramatic and non-dramatic.⁷ An exhaustive study of all works has not been possible, but it appeared just as important to mention some facts on the general background on the new interest in Greek tragedy in this century.

⁴W. Jens, Hofmannsthal und die Griechen, (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1955); E. Steingruber, Hugo von Hofmannsthals Sophokleische Dramen (Winterthur: P. G. Keller, 1956); H. Watson-Williams, André Gide and the Greek Myth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁵R. Derche, "Oedipe," in Quatre mythes poétiques: Oedipe, Narcisse, Psyché, Lorelei (Paris: Société d'Éditions d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1962), pp. 10-69; H.-G. Francq, "Les malheurs d'Oedipe. Etude comparée de l'Oedipe de Corneille, Voltaire, Sophocle, Sénèque, Gide, Cocteau," Revue de l'Université Laval, 20 (1966), 211-224, 308-317, 458-480, 560-569, 657-675.

⁶K. Hamburger, Von Sophokles zu Sartre: Griechische Dramenfiguren antik und modern (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1962); an important work, though not up-to-date, is, K. Heinemann, Die tragischen Gestalten der Griechen in der Weltliteratur (Leipzig, 1920); an approach based on psychoanalysis is given in, K. Kerényi, "Vorwort," Ödipus I and II, Theater der Jahrhunderte, ed. Joachim Schondorff (München: Langen - Müller, 1968).

⁷A survey of the Oedipus and Antigone treatments in this century is given in, M. Dietrich, "Antiker Mythos im modernen Drama," Das moderne Drama (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1961), pp. 388-427.

For the traditional characters of the myth, it seemed more logical to use the English spelling of the names, as they always refer to the same person; only for new characters the foreign spellings have not been changed. For the classical works no page references are given because of the variety of editions; the texts used here are listed chronologically in the bibliography.

THE GREEK OEDIPUS

Sophocles did not invent the story for his two famous plays, Oedipus Tyrannus and Oedipus at Colonus. Long before him, Homer and Hesiod had mentioned Oedipus. Thus, Odysseus meets Epicasta (later better known as Jocasta) in the underworld, and the account of her life is the earliest outline of the whole story:

And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicastè,
who wrought a dread deed with unwitting mind, in
that she wedded her son; but the gods made these
things known among men. Yet he still ruled over
the Cadmeans in lovely Thebes, suffering anguish
by the dire counsels of the gods; but she went to
the house of Hades, the strong warder, when she
had fastened a noose on high from the roof-beam,
possessed by her pain; and to him she bequeathed
sorrows full many, even all that a mother's
Avengers' bring to pass.

In the Iliad, there is a short allusion to Oedipus when Mekisteus is said to have attended the funeral games which were celebrated after the death of Oedipus (Iliad 23, 679-680). In Hesiod a dispute over the flocks of Oedipus is the cause of a war at Thebes.² In the Theogony (326) he knows the sphinx as the daughter of Echidna and he calls her by her Boiotian name, Phix, associated with the Phikian hills where she sat waiting for her victims.

Oedipus was also the hero of a long epic poem, the Oidipodeia, the first of the three parts known as the Theban cycle, and sometimes attributed to an 8th century poet, Kinaithon of Lacedemon. Only one fragment is left which describes the sphinx

¹Odyssey 11, 275-280, quoted from R. C. Jebb, Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part I, The Oedipus Tyrannus, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1893), p. xii; quotations from Sophocles will also be in this translation of Jebb.

²cf. Jebb, p. xiii.

devouring young Theban citizens, among them noble Haemon, son of Creon. Pausanias who follows this poem calls Oedipus' wife, the mother of his four children, Eteocles, Polynices, Ismene and Antigone, Euryganeia (ix, 5, 11). This may be simply another name for Jocasta,³ or as Pausanias points out, she was his second wife, while he had no children by Jocasta; Homer in the Nekuia had not mentioned any children either. Of the so-called "cyclic" Thebais, to distinguish it from the 4th century Thebais by Antimachos of Kolophon, two fragments are left that tell us about Oedipus cursing his sons.⁴

Pindar knew the story, too (Olympian 2, 35); other sources for the tragedians could have been early historians, like the Athenian Pherekydes (ca. 500 B. C.),⁵ and the epic called Cyprian Lays where, according to Proclus, Nestor relates the story of Oedipus.⁶

These early versions of the myth, some of them only dealing with one or two episodes, and not always coinciding in details, nevertheless give its basic structure. It seems, however, that some essential points of the tragedy that caused the most controversial interpretations, such as the offspring of the incestuous marriage and the self-blinding of Oedipus, are probably an agglomeration of different stories which by and by have been associated with the same central figure, Oedipus.⁷

³Carl Robert, Geschichte eines poetischen Stoffs im Altertum (Berlin: Weidmann, 1915), pp. 44, 150.

⁴Robert, p. 169ff.

⁵Robert, p. 109.

⁶Jebb, p. xiv.

⁷Marie Delcourt, Oedipe ou la légende du Conquérant, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fascicule CIV (Paris: Société d'Ed. Les Belles Lettres, 1944), see in particular her introduction.

SOPHOCLES: OEDIPUS TYRANNUS

However there is no doubt that for the literary influence of the Oedipus myth on later generations, the tragedies have pushed all earlier treatments in the background. Here the loose epic treatments were ordered into a firm dramatic structure based on a strict sequence of events: the oracle given to Laius, the birth and exposure of the child, the involuntary murder of the father, the victory over the Sphinx, and the marriage with his mother Jocasta. From the Trilogy by Aeschylus, Laius, Oedipus, and The Seven Against Thebes, followed by a satyr play, The Sphinx, only the third part and some small fragments are known to us. It seems however that, as in his trilogy on the Atreidae, he has stressed the curse laid on the whole family, while Sophocles, writing independent plays, will concentrate on the individual hero. This appears in the form of the oracle foretelling only the destruction of the city, without mentioning the parricide (The Seven Against Thebes, 748). By the middle of the 5th century the myth was sufficiently known, and Sophocles could choose and concentrate on the short but truly tragic moment in the life of Oedipus where his whole past is recalled and inexorably revealed to have been founded on mere illusions that led to such terrible consequences. It seems that to be able to appeal to so many generations, Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus must represent universal human conflicts. Yet to find one single aspect responsible for this seems difficult, for looking at the numerous critical interpretations and even more at the creative adaptations, it appears that many of its aspects can be stressed and hence lead to different approaches.

The plot is based on two inquiries, the first of public concern: Who has slain King Laius? For according to the oracle, the unpunished murderer is responsible for the present plague. It will soon be superseded and eventually merge with the private quest

of Oedipus: Who am I? Thus it becomes more than a police inquiry for a criminal, but as W. Jaeger puts it:

Sophoclean drama is the drama of the emotions through which the soul of the chief actor must pass, following in its own rhythm the harmonious development of the plot. The source of his dramatic effect is the hero's character, to which, as to the highest and final point of interest, it always returns. Dramatic action is for Sophocles the process by which the true nature of a suffering human being is unfolded, by which he fulfils his destiny, and through it fulfils himself.⁸

There is no doubt that Oedipus' recognition of his unwittingly committed crimes is the climax the play is leading to. For the audience the result of the inquiry is not a surprise, they see the hidden relation of events and believe Tiresias who almost from the start reveals everything. The important aspect is how Oedipus, and the other characters will eventually find out by themselves. The figure of Oedipus dominates the play, and the changes in his attitudes are closely linked to the plot. First he appears as the fatherly and beloved king, then, contradicted by Tiresias, he grows very angry with him and even more so with Creon. With Jocasta's account of the murder of Laius, doubts arise in Oedipus, they turn into fear and an unyielding determination to learn the truth at all cost. The anagnorisis leads to the short passionate rage of his blinding, and the play concludes on an utterly pitiful but not rebellious figure. But Oedipus' inquiry could not remain absolutely private; it should be noticed that he is never alone on stage. The different steps of the revelation are marked by his relation to other people who should help him in his discovery. These interlocutors who see the events from their own standpoint cast a new light on the events and through them the scope of the play is broadened.

⁸Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, I, trans. Gilbert Highet, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 284.

The play opens with the suppliant priest and Theban citizens gathered round the altars at the steps of Oedipus' palace. This religious atmosphere is strengthened by Creon's report of the Delphic oracle. Oedipus who promises to fulfil its order and punish the murderer of Laius appears as a pious man acting entirely in agreement with the god's demand. His anger aroused by Tiresias' revelation is by no means an attack on religion, at the most it is directed against its servants. It is, just as Jocasta's scepticism towards oracles, a natural reaction against what simply appears to be wrong: it would not be rational for him to accept Tiresias' disclosure right away. It is the problem of self-knowledge that had first been raised on a superficial level in regard to the identity of his parents by the companion in Corinth. Whoever they are is not important, he tells Jocasta just before she leaves:

Break forth what will! Be my race never so lowly,
I must crave to learn it. Yon woman, perchance -
for she is proud with more than a woman's pride -
thinks shame of my base source. But I who hold
myself son of Fortune that gives good, will not be
dishonoured. She is the mother from whom I spring...

(11. 1076-1082)

She has understood that it did matter and her shame prevents her from accepting such a reality. For a self-confident man, as Sophocles has presented Oedipus in the first part of the play, the blow will not only result in shame: it is also the recognition that all his former convictions, the image he had held of himself and of the world, are shattered as utter illusion. The blinding then becomes a symbol of disgust at what he has done, as well as of the awareness that he has been so blind. Before, he could accuse the priest and the oracles of lying - now that he has to believe it, he could rebel against the gods and accuse them of injustice, but he does not. This acceptance as well as an unconditional belief in divine justice has led us to look for some moral fault in Oedipus'

behaviour. Is there hybris in his self-assuredness as almighty king at the opening, or does his anger against Tiresias make him guilty? Such explanations are absurd, as his crimes had been committed a long time ago, while the argument that he could have lived happily without knowing contradicts the passion for truth, the essence of Sophocles' tragedy. The conflict of destiny and free will can only be shown by presenting the earlier events of Oedipus' life that decided the fulfilment of the oracle. This was not the major concern of Sophocles, but a few modern playwrights have realized this.

Oedipus' attitude toward supernatural forces is certainly capable of many different interpretations, but the play is by no means a mere theological discussion. His anger against Tiresias and Creon is the monarch's fear of conspiracy. He, the adventurer, who happens to have liberated the city from the sphinx, has become king. Though he seems popular with the citizens, he is aware of a possible jealousy in Creon, which explains his harsh reaction at the suspicion of a plot. Creon's character is in no way outstanding; as he tells Oedipus he prefers a quiet life to an uneasy throne (ll. 585-589), but when at the end he is virtually king he again stands up for moderation and promises a fair treatment to Oedipus and his children, without any feeling of revenge.

As a king, Oedipus is above all the public figure such as he appears at the opening. It is remarkable how much the whole city participates in the action. The chorus shows the attitude of the righteous citizens toward the events, asking their gods for help and remembering their divine laws. They also express the people's confusion, their doubts and hopes according to the latest probabilities. After the anagnorisis they recall common places on the illusions of man's happiness, a thought on which the play ends:

Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is
Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a
man most mighty; on whose fortunes what citizen

did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come! Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.

(11. 1524-1530)

Their function is to watch and comment on the events as far as they can understand them themselves, but they are not exceptionally lucid as is best shown by the ode after the announcement that Oedipus is not Polybus' son. Jocasta has already understood everything when they dream of a divine origin of their king - a terrible irony before the final recognition. By means of the dialogues each of the major characters actively participates in the action. Oedipus does not hesitate to talk directly to his people, and the denouement is brought about by the information from the messenger from Corinth and the old Theban shepherd.

Such are the religious, political, and "social" aspects revealed through Oedipus' relations with the various people of his city. There remains his relationship with Jocasta, the crucial point of the tragedy. For modern psychologists this may be rather disappointing: their only long dialogue following the quarrel with Creon, is for both of them a flashback on past events of their lives. It is this very scene that has been considered by critics as highly improbable: how could Oedipus ignore the circumstances of Laius' death, or Jocasta not know who were his (supposed) parents, when they had been married for so long? There appears however, a striking difference in their characters: whereas Oedipus is determined to know the truth about himself by all means, she forebodes some disaster for their present happiness, and is much more reluctant to do so, trying to keep him away from any further investigation. More sensitive to the imminent truth, she understands before the arrival of the shepherd, and is not able to outlive the revelation. They will not meet again, but Oedipus will afterwards break by force into her room crying for a sword. As she has

already strangled herself the only way he can be united to her in self-punishment is by piercing his eyes with the golden brooches of her dress.

Looking at Sophocles' tragedy with possible interpretations and innovations by later writers in view, the plot appears to be so tightly woven that, if the same moment of Oedipus' life is chosen for the dramatic action, only changes in attitudes, characters, and relations of persons seem possible. As to the inquiries leading up to the anagnorisis, new ways of learning the truth depend on the beliefs in different prophetic powers replacing or changing the function of the oracle and of Tiresias. The later Oedipus plays show that this could be achieved by means of the ghost of Laius, by the sphinx, or by an interiorized, instinctive kind of oracle.

SOPHOCLES: OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

The final scene of the Oedipus Tyrannus introducing Oedipus' young daughters Ismene and Antigone, could lead to a melodramatic end if the horror of the preceding events were not so vividly present in everybody's mind. This is no longer true for Sophocles' second Oedipus play which takes place several years later, after the exile of Oedipus. Sophocles, who had first dealt with the tragedy of Oedipus and his family in the Antigone (442 or 441 B.C.), some twelve years before the Oedipus Tyrannus (ca. 429, the latest possible date being 420 B.C.), continued to be attracted to this theme all through his life, and shortly before his death, in 406 B.C., he gave his final views on Oedipus' destiny, in Oedipus at Colonus, which was staged only after his death, in 401 B.C. The three plays correspond somehow to the poet's own age at the time of writing, Sophocles in the last one presenting the blind old man's arrival in Colonus, near Athens, where, as he knows, the gods want him to die.

In the Oedipus Tyrannus there was not much actually happening, but it was characterized by a high dramatic tension based on the progress of the inquiry. This is not the case for the slowly moving Oedipus at Colonus, all dominated by the resigned hero. His presence on stage all through the play until his miraculous disappearance at the end contributes to its static nature. The function of the other characters who are confronted with him is to show their attitude to his former misfortunes and the consequences in his family. The two daughters have remained faithful to the father, Antigone accompanying him in his exile, while Ismene arrives to report the quarrel of the brothers in Thebes and their request to have Oedipus back, although they would not bury him in the city itself. They are afraid that, after having died in exile, Oedipus' soul might bring distress to them and their city. He, however, resigned and at peace with the gods, is unyielding in his attitude toward Thebes. King Theseus proves to have more sympathy for his situation and allows him to die at Colonus, a suburb of Athens, where Sophocles himself had been born. Oedipus promises in return that his dead body will protect Theseus' city, Athens, in the future. This is easily recognized as a glorification of Athens, Sophocles' city, and famous for its justice. This ideal is opposed by Prince Creon, who in this play appears as a cruel and selfish man, not respecting the sacred rights of hospitality.

Oedipus, who seems to have lost all interest in the activities of life, surprises us by his violent outbreak of anger at Polynices' arrival. Not even Antigone can reconcile him with his son, and prevent his curse predicting the war against Thebes and the death of the brothers. Soon afterwards thunder announces the moment of his death. Where and how exactly this miraculous disappearance took place, Theseus alone knows. This is all the messenger can tell Oedipus' daughters and the chorus:

But by what doom Oedipus perished, no man can tell, save Theseus alone. No fiery thunderbolt of the god removed him in that hour nor any rising of storm from the sea; but either a messenger from the gods, or the world of the dead, the nether adamant, riven for him in love, without pain; for the passing of the man was not with lamentation, or in sickness and suffering, but, above mortal's, wonderful.

(11.1656-1666)

The move away from the public disaster to the personal suffering of the Oedipus Tyrannus is even stronger in the Oedipus at Colonus, the last play of Sophocles. The spirit of this play is not easily grasped by those who do not share Sophocles' religious beliefs. Is it not melodrama, this "happy end", where the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus raises him, the future protector of Athens, to an almost godlike figure? Is there tragedy at all? Is it tragedy in an Aeschylean sense, the curse on the sons, the tragedy of the race leading to the destruction of Thebes? Or is it rather the tragic consciousness of the powerful presence of the gods? Oedipus knows his crimes were done unwittingly, he has no feeling of guilt, and yet he accepts his suffering aware of the Delphic "know thyself". It is then tragic self-knowledge of a man conscious of his limits.

Throughout the centuries, the two plays, have been much admired, above all the Oedipus Tyrannus, mostly for its dramatic perfection. Aristotle is certainly responsible for the outstanding reputation of the Oedipus Tyrannus in which he found a complex plot with "the finest kind of recognition accompanied by simultaneous reversals", (Poetics 1452a), a plot arousing pity and fear (1453b), and based on the tragedy of a famous family (1453a). The influence of Aristotle's Poetics was so strong that only at the end of the last century have new approaches to Sophocles started. There has been a general tendency to see the plays much more in relation to Sophocles' own time, and the critics have shifted their stress from the purely technical aspects to the moral, religious,

psychological and anthropological implications of the plays.⁹ The stereotype view of Sophocles as an example of serenity, piety and sophrosyne began to be questioned. His characters do not explicitly express critical attitudes like those in the works of Aeschylus and Euripides who constantly raise theological and social problems. The main problem is perhaps to find the opinions of Sophocles himself who, for so long, had been identified with the chorus alone. But it seems that this traditional popular religion is powerless when applied to an extraordinary figure like Oedipus. Even if the chorus participated in the dramatic progress of the play, these Theban citizens nevertheless remain outside spectators of the suffering of Oedipus. If their proverbial wisdom has an answer to all these problems, Oedipus himself has still to come to terms with them as his own very personal experience.

If at the end of the Oedipus Tyrannus he accepts his situation, and in the Oedipus at Colonus reaches a profound peace of mind, this solution of the problems in the tragedy does not exclude the conflicts altogether: whatever Sophocles' answers are, the destiny of Oedipus itself still raises questions on the relations of the gods and men, of fate and free will, knowledge and wisdom. All these problems discussed by 5th century Greek philosophers are somehow contained in the tragedy. It is the characteristic of the myth to present general important questions of the human mind with a concrete story through which a solution is attempted. The Sophists themselves were using the myth to expound their doctrine,

⁹In the nineteenth century interest in Sophocles was renewed by Jebb in England, but in Germany only with Tycho von Wilamowitz' study, Sophokles (1917), a revived interest began; he stressed exclusively the perfection of dramatic craftsmanship, but against this onesided approach a reaction soon followed, and other aspects were emphasized by critics like by K. Reinhardt, C.M. Bowra, V. Ehrenberg, and others. For a survey of recent criticism, see Albin Lesky, Die griechische Tragödie, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, 1964), pp. 279-280.

and so was Socrates. Instead of the early Ionian philosophers' concern with the nature of the universe, and Aeschylus' preoccupation with theology, the late fifth century has shifted its centre of interest toward man and his rational forces. Sophocles, whose sympathies seem to be on the side of the traditional religious beliefs with a stress on the irrational forces, is aware of the new tendencies, too, and gives his own answer to them. He is a man of his time, and other echoes to contemporary Athens can be found in the play. The plague of the tragedy has been related to the terrible epidemic in Athens in 428 B.C. described by Thucydides (Bk. II ch. vii), who also mentions that the people tried to explain by oracles an otherwise inexplicable disaster. Though outliving Pericles by over twenty years, Sophocles kept the Pericleian spirit. Political implications, even if not so strong as in the Antigone, are part of the Oedipus Tyrannus while the Oedipus at Colonus is to a large extent an Attic addition to the myth. Sophocles himself took an active part in the public life of Athens, from the Persian Wars through fifty years of the city's peak of glory to the division of Greece in the Peloponnesian War. His tragedies thus become the reflection of a time which aimed at the highest ideal of the kalos kagathos, but which beside the freedom of democracy and a flourishing cultural life also knew the disorder and suffering of war.

EURIPIDES: PHOENISSAE

Beside the two plays by Sophocles there is one more Greek tragedy which is closely linked with Oedipus' destiny: Euripides' Phoenissae (410 B.C.)¹⁰ This misleading title designates

¹⁰It is the third part of a trilogy, the two other plays, Oenomaos and Chrysippos being lost. The three were linked by the theme of malediction, in the first Oenomaos cursing Pelops, in the second Chrysippos cursing Laios, while in the Phoenissae it is Oedipus who curses his sons. Euripides had written three other

the chorus of young beautiful Phoenician girls who are on their way to Delphi, where they are going to serve Apollo, but they have been stopped by the war in Thebes. What they watch there, the action of the play, largely corresponds to Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes. Yet many elements of the two Oedipus tragedies by Sophocles, as well as influences from the Greek epic versions, beside Euripides' own inventions, are introduced in this play. This multitude of features somewhat destroys the unity of the work, especially as there is not one single figure round which the work turns. In relation to the legend of Oedipus, an important part is the prologue by Jocasta who here survives the revelation of the Oedipus Tyrannus, and now recalls her past life. In the play, she and Antigone will try without success to prevent the brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, from killing each other. Creon, as associate of the villain Eteocles, is more clearly drawn than in the Oedipus Tyrannus, while one of the new elements is the self-sacrifice of his son Menoeceus for the salvation of Thebes. Jocasta stabs herself over the dead bodies of her sons, and the play ends on a long scene between Oedipus, whom Euripides makes also survive the death of his sons, and Creon and Antigone. For the first time she seems to appear as companion to her father in exile, and, unless this last part is a later addition, it has served Sophocles as a model for his second Oedipus. The local Attic legend of the hero's death at Colonus is here for the

tragedies dealing with the Labdakidae: The Suppliant Women (War of Thebes), an Antigone and an Oedipus (after 425), the two later ones being lost except for a few fragments. It appears however that his Oedipus was a political tragedy opposing Oedipus and Creon who discovered his murder of Laios, which led to Oedipus' blinding by the friends of the former king. Jocasta remains his faithful companion until the incest is discovered and she commits suicide. The opposition between Oedipus and Creon is characteristic for a few later plays, e.g. for its political motives in Dryden (see below p. 31), and for psychological ones in H. von Hofmannsthal and Gide (see below p. 64). For a detailed study of Euripides' Oedipus versions cf. Robert, "Die Phoinissen des Euripides", "Der Oidipus des Euripides", and "Die Antigone des Euripides", op. cit., pp. 396-456; 305-331, and 381-395.

first time integrated in the tragedy, while the opposition of Creon and Antigone concerning the burial of Polynices recalls Sophocles' Antigone, though here she seems to resign to Creon's order, and prefers to leave with her father.

The chorus, too, has some significance for later developments,¹¹ and in the play itself it puts the tragedy of the Theban race in a broader context by recalling the arrival of their ancestor Kadmos from Phoenicia in Thebes, which makes their appearance in the city less arbitrary. By mentioning the monstrous beings throughout Theban history, the present events, including the destruction of the sphinx, are seen as part of the inhuman and cruel destiny of a whole race. The Phoenissae is very different in spirit from Sophocles' tragedies. This play shows many of Euripides' religious and political views - his hatred of the gods' cruelty, his passion for "equality" and his scorn for war.

With the tragedies of the 5th century B.C. the story of Oedipus (Sagenstoff), concluded by Euripides' Phoenissae and Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, has received its definitive structure, and later developments are of no interest to the history of the myth or saga itself (Sagengeschichte).¹² This does not mean that for later generations the destiny of Oedipus has no more significance, on the contrary - but their attitudes will always be considered as interpretations of the established Greek version, whether they are taken from an anthropological, psychological, literary, philosophical or other point of view. Within the literary approach another distinction is necessary: criticism will not touch on the received

¹¹ This appears in the Oedipus of Seneca who knew Euripides' Phoenissae (see below p. 20); it also became a major source for Statius' Thebaid (see below p. 22), while very recently R. Pannwitz' Thebais gives a history of Thebes which in many of its descriptions is close to the choral odes in both Euripides and Seneca (see below p. 91).

¹² cf. Robert, p. 494.

text, its first concern lying with the work of the tragedian itself, while in new Oedipus plays it is possible to alter and thus stress certain aspects which may be inherent in Sophocles, or express a new attitude toward them. Instead of looking at the literary criticism of the Oedipus tragedies throughout the centuries, it is just as rewarding to study the creative reinterpretations. In recasting Sophocles' tragedies (or, if they adopt a very different view, the myth, rather than its dramatic expression), many writers have expressed their own opinions on the problem, influenced by their personal interests and those of their time, as well as by other earlier treatments they knew.¹³

¹³ Several more Oedipus tragedies, of which nothing is left, had been written in the 5th and 4th century B. C. Antimachos is the author of another epic poem on the subject, a Thebaid (4th c. B. C.), which is also almost entirely lost (cf. Robert, p. 491-494); for the so-called rationalist and paradoxical treatments in late antiquity, see below p. 120.

SENECA : OEDIPUS

With the Greek colonization of Italy and Sicily, Greek mythology soon spread into the Italian peninsula where it became a popular theme for innumerable Etruscan potteries, while for Roman literature, in its beginnings so much depending on Greece, it always was one of its main sources for tragedy. In the second century B.C., Pacuvius and Accius were imitating Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Varius wrote a Thyestes, and Ovid a Medea, both lost now. The Oedipus theme itself had been treated, (or perhaps it was simply a translation from Sophocles) by Julius Caesar, while according to Suetonius (Nero 46), Nero loved to play the part of the self-blinded Oedipus, and this was the character he was acting in the last public recitation he gave.

Thus, when Seneca wrote his Oedipus,¹ the educated audience or readers were familiar with the myth, and indeed Seneca has not added any further development to the action of the Oedipus Tyrannus, but he concludes with the blinded Oedipus leaving for exile. The Delphic oracle and its fulfilment is the same, the tragedy starts at the same moment of Oedipus' life and leads to the same revelation, and yet this is no longer the Oedipus of Sophocles. If the plot has not basically changed, there are, however, three main aspects that differ significantly from the Greek tragedy: the character of Oedipus himself, the long additional scenes of divination, and the structure of the play.

¹date unknown, either during his exile, 41-49, or during stay at court, 49-62, A.D.

The play reflects the world in which Seneca lived: Augustus by force of character and competence had become the single leader of the Roman Empire. This system continued after his death under the reign of the Claudii which corresponds to Seneca's time. With Caligula and Nero, this autocratic power turned into real tyranny, and Seneca could witness many important people of true greatness suffer injustice. He himself experienced extreme changes in fortune, from an ascetic life to a brilliant career and successful relations at court, followed by a sudden disgrace and an eight year exile in Corsica from which he was recalled to become the preceptor of Nero and one of the most important men of the Roman world.

Such facts have to be considered as a background for the general mood of the play, which right from the beginning stands in contrast to Sophocles' play. Instead of listening as a benevolent, but also very self-reliant king to suppliant citizens, Seneca's tragedy opens with a long speech by Oedipus, a monologue in spite of Jocasta's presence. In utter dejection, the Roman hero loathes himself and his kingship, and lingers on a detailed description of the plague. All these disasters present, past and future, appear to him as personal afflictions: he cannot forget the horror of the Delphic oracle he had been told, and intuitively he knows that he is responsible for the present plague in Thebes. It is the hopelessness of a man truly convinced of his own damnation: "Cum magna horreas/ quod posse fieri non putes, metuas tamen:/ cuncta expauesco meque non credo mihi" (l. 25-27). He himself, the infaustus hospes (l. 80) in Thebes, is the suppliant, and all he wants is to die or to flee from Thebes. His concern for Thebes is never genuine ["Quisquamne regno gaudet?" (l. 6)], and though at the end he is liberating the city from its miseries by his departure, he is more aware of his own sufferings, showing a Stoic resignation mixed with the masochistic satisfaction of a man who

knows he is damned. For such a character the change from blissful ignorance to painful knowledge can no longer have the power of the Sophoclean peripeteia. Seneca's effect is accumulative; the dark forebodings, the oracle of parricide and incest soon to be realized, these are ultimately increased by an unforetold crime, the death of his mother for which he also feels responsible.² The necessary fulfilment of the oracle as shown by Sophocles was not enough for Seneca: his Oedipus even triumphs over fate by an unforetold horror: "O Phoebe mendax, fata superavi impia" (l. 1046).

The most striking new aspect in Seneca is his entirely new vision of religion. The Romans could not appreciate the Delphic oracles, the wisdom and the prophecies of Tiresias. Under Etruscan influence they have acquired a great skill in the art of the haruspex, in birdlore and necromancy. When Sophocles' Creon reports from Delphi, he only mentions the answer itself, while in Seneca, not only is the oracle much more explicit, but the whole ritual of the priestess is also described (ll. 223-239), not unlike that of Virgil's Sybil at Cumae (Aeneid vi). For the Roman Tiresias a direct knowledge of hidden facts is not possible: his power is to be able to interpret the sacred rituals. Thus instead of the Greek intellectual inquiry for truth, the Latin play has two impressive scenes of divination. A huge sacrifice becomes part of the dramatic action and through the comments of his daughter Manto on the shape and the brightness of the flames, the entrails and the coagulation of the blood, Tiresias will try to find out the murderer of Laius. This is not yet sufficient, it is only clear that some unnatural phenomenon has taken place: "Natura versa est, nulla lex utero manet" (l. 371). Only by

²Cf the 16th century English translation by A. Nevyle where he actually stabs his mother at her demand.

evoking the ghost of Laius the truth may be revealed. But at such a ceremony Oedipus, like the Roman emperors, is not allowed to take part (cf. Tacitus, Annales I, 62). Creon's report of this mysterious ritual of Etruscan necromancy adds to the strongly visual effect of the play, and to the constant effort to create an atmosphere. The lugubrious dark wood, the rituals of Tiresias, the sacrifices, the opening of the earth and the contact with the underworld, the appearance of monsters, and eventually the revelation by the bloody ghost of Laius - all this leaves a strange, emotional effect, an impression of painful effort and physical horror, quite appropriate as background to Oedipus' state of mind.

Everywhere in the play the aspects of cruelty or physical repulsiveness are stressed. Creon is sent to prison - Seneca knows what happens to those in disgrace with the tyrant - and he will not reappear at the end where there is no attempt at reconciliation as in the Oedipus Tyrannus. We are left with the horror of Oedipus' blinding and Jocasta's suicide on the stage.

Seneca's peculiar conception of Oedipus' character affects the structure of the play, too: the long opening speech does not leave many possibilities for a slow unravelling, and the dramatic power of the Greek plot is lost. But this is also linked to the fact that it was not meant to be performed, at least not in a huge open air theatre as the Greek tragedies were. Most probably Seneca's plays were recited for small audiences. The best proof is the sacrifice scene that could never be staged, while public and private reading allows for long descriptive passages. Compared to Sophocles it is a short Oedipus version with long additions. Oedipus' conflict is interiorized, but it maintains the dramatic unity of the play. The structural continuity however is broken by the "interludes" of magic and necromancy, as well as by the long

choral odes.³ Though these can be associated with the action of the play, they do not actively contribute to its progress. There is hardly any dialogue between the chorus and the other characters, on the contrary, its role is rather to separate scenes. Some passages are of great lyrical beauty; these odes also help to suggest the context of the tragedy by stressing the effects of the plague, by enlarging the scope in recalling the history of Thebes and its numerous monsters, or again by drawing a moral lesson on moderation and the power of destiny in the last songs. All these long descriptive parts appealing to the imagination refer to realities that could not be appreciated or even presented in a stage performance. T.S. Eliot sees here an essential difference from the Greek spirit, and its product, the dialogue of tragedy:

This is merely a particular case of the amazing unity of Greek, the unity of concrete and abstract in philosophy, the unity of thought and feeling, action and speculation in life. In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn.⁴

In Seneca the word alone is powerful, but can it give more than a thrill of horror? Later Renaissance imitators of Seneca admired him specifically for this, and transposed it into action in the so-called tragedy of blood. But in the Greek tragedy

³Seneca also wrote a probably unfinished Phoenissae, of which two fragments are left; he knew Euripides' tragedy very well for the choral songs of his Oedipus are modelled on those of the Greek Phoenissae, but his chorus is less well linked to the play than that of Euripides, because the excuse for their Phoenician origin and their particular point of view is missing.

⁴Introduction to: Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies, trans. into English, ed. by Th. Newton 1581, I (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1927), p. viii.

the thrill is much more intellectual, though closely linked to the specific case which is the subject of the play. Here the difference in spirit between the Sophoclean and the Senecan Oedipus also appears. In both man is confronted with the irrational, but if for the Greek tragedian it is embodied in the divine, superhuman wisdom, it becomes for the Roman writer the dark, mysterious forces of the underworld. Tiresias does not know any more, but he is able to communicate with the ghosts that play the role of the Delphic oracle. In a Christian view, Seneca appears much more superstitious than Sophocles does, and on the other hand, the sense of dependence on chthonic forces and the death wish of Oedipus in form of reunion with nature (l. 867-870), in contemporary terms, the unconscious premonitions, cannot but suggest Freudian theories to a 20th century reader. Yet the belief in determinism is here that of a Stoic characterized by a peculiar moral twist. The chorus sings, "Fatis agimur; Cedite Fatis" (l. 980), but Oedipus, rather than calmly resign to his terrible destiny, in a frenzied fit of passion, punishes himself by tearing out his eyes. The play thus unites the traditional moral character of Roman tragedy with the ideas of the sophisticated aristocratic society of Seneca's time that, strongly attracted by an orientalised hellenism enjoyed problems of psychology and moral philosophy in salon discussions.

FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It is not possible to jump directly from Antiquity to the twentieth century interpretations without considering some characteristics of the numerous Oedipus treatments written in the meantime. Many of the authors are forgotten now, and so are their works. Yet on the other hand, some of these new versions were influential works in their time; written by famous literary figures, they were much discussed and often served as approved or disapproved models for later interpretations.

There are two quite different trends in the Oedipus literature. The first, going back to the Oedipus myth, to the story of the life, rather than to the tragedies, is to be found in epic treatments. It is the earlier of the two, and its main importance in the history of the theme is to have kept the literary tradition alive. When, with the Renaissance, tragedy was to be revived, the dramatic power of the theme was rediscovered, and for the tragedies of the next centuries the Greek tragedians as well as Seneca became a basic source.

If the Greek epics of the Theban cycle are all lost but for a few fragments, we still have the Latin Thebaid by P. Papinius Statius. This long epic, of which the main theme is the quarrel of Eteocles and Polynices, was written some twenty years after Seneca's death. Its importance for the Oedipus theme is mainly in the introductory passages of Book 1, where the blind Oedipus invokes Tisiphone and curses his sons; she hears him, hurries to Thebes, and the rest of the work then tells the story of the two brothers.

It is through the influence of Statius that the story of Thebes was taken up in several medieval works. The French Roman de Thèbes gives a long and quite picturesque account of

the life of Oedipus before going into its main subject, the war between his two sons. If for the outline of the story at least, this long, anonymous work of the middle of the 12th century is indebted to Statius, it is nevertheless, in its descriptive passages, much closer to feudal society and court life. Oedipus kills Laius at a tournament and becomes a hero, while the sphinx is said to be a devil. There is hardly anything of the concentrated dramatic plot: Jocasta knows that Oedipus has killed Laius before she marries him, and the moral of the story seems to be that she has to be punished for this voluntary unfaithfulness. The final truth comes out when one day Jocasta washes Oedipus' feet: there is no plague, no Tiresias, and no oracle except the one received by Laius.¹

In Italy Boccaccio has a passage, "De Yocasta, Thebarum regina", in his De claris mulieribus. Though he is aware of the Sophoclean-Senecan version where Jocasta kills herself right after the blinding of Oedipus, he follows the Phoenissae version of Euripides where she stabs herself only after the death of Eteocles and Polynices. This form is taken up by Hans Sachs in his Ein tragedi, mit dreyzehen personen zu recidirn, die unglückhafftig königin Iocasta, und hat fünff actus, (1550). For the influence of Antiquity at this time in Germany where the religious debates pushed the Renaissance ideas into the background, this is an interesting work, half-way between drama and epic. Hans Sachs himself gives the old historians, as well as Boccaccio and Ovid (cf. Tristia I, 1, 114) as his sources. In the title the term recidirn is more significant than the term tragedi; for him the distinction between tragic and comic lies in the happy or unhappy ending of his characters. The "performance" of this recited epic

¹cf. Lydgate's work, The Siege of Thebes, which is mainly based on the French Roman de Thèbes.

would not take much more than half an hour though it includes the birth of Oedipus, the revelation and the blinding, and finishes only with Jocasta's death after the duel of her sons. In this 16th century work references to medieval life are to give an atmosphere of "Antiquity". Thus the king of Corinth wants to bring up Oedipus as a cavalier: "So lass es lehrnen und studirn,/ Auch ritterspiel, kempff und thurnirn" (Act II). Because he is a military hero and has slain Laius, he is to marry Jocasta. There are no oracles, no sphinx: but the gods appear themselves. The cause of war between the two brothers is no longer the curse of the father, but the flatterings of Sathanus, der Hoffschmeichler; this is the last of the five moral points of the conclusion where Jocasta's suicide is also disapproved: however great man's suffering is, he has always to trust in God.

Although Sachs does not seem to have used the tragedies as a source and model for his plays, the Greek tragedians had been rediscovered more than a hundred years earlier.

Rejected by early Christianity, the tradition of a few Greek plays was nevertheless kept alive in Byzantium where they continued copying manuscripts and commenting on the texts. The gathering of these manuscripts by Italian scholars was to be the starting point for the Renaissance revival of tragedy.²

Perhaps even more than in Italy the influence of Greek

²It was in 1422 that Aurispa sent back to Italy the famous codex of Sophocles, known as the Laurentian manuscript. Soon afterwards the Greek tragedians became a regular subject of study in Italian and other European universities, and in 1502, the seven plays of Sophocles were printed by Aldus in Venice. A famous performance of the Oedipus Tyrannus in Italian took place in 1585, at the inauguration of Palladio's Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, with Oedipus played by the blind Luigi Groto.

as well as Senecan tragedy was to be felt in the rebirth of tragedy in France and England. The process is too complex to be examined here, but a few general points can help to explain origins of the later modern versions of old themes. The study of the ancient plays in the universities led to important scholarly works, particularly to the writing of Poetics establishing on the basis of the classical models, in particular the Oedipus Tyrannus, rules to be followed by any playwright. Imitation and emulation were almost synonymous, and little room is left for reinterpretations. Translations were more frequent than adaptations which, except for a few amendments, stay close to the original.

If in France both Sophocles and Seneca were studied and imitated, England was much more familiar with the Latin dramatist who had such an important influence on its Renaissance theatre. It is Alexander Nevyle who, in 1560, translated Seneca's Oedipus which was to be included in the translation of Seneca's Tenne Tragedies published in 1581. In the preface to the reader he clearly states his aim which he also believed to be Seneca's: the play should warn the people of his time to be aware of the sudden changes of Fortune. Yet to obtain this aim he does not hesitate to add or leave out in order to show that he could "invent". "The impulse toward the Tragedy of Blood is already present in these translators, and they do not hesitate to add or alter; the distortion of Seneca begins with his translation."³ And thus Nevyle makes Oedipus kill Jocasta at her request. This gradual move away from the original, first through the translations, has been true for later revivals, too, especially at the turning of our century.

³T.S. Eliot, "Introduction," to Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies, op. cit., p. XLX.

The three Oedipus plays that could have a direct influence on the 20th century plays, mostly because of their famous authors, are those by Corneille, Voltaire, and in a lesser degree, the one by Dryden and Lee. All three go back to the classical models, Sophocles and Seneca. Aware of the structural perfection of the Greek tragedy, they nevertheless approach it with a critical eye, and in their own works try to improve on the supposed inconsistencies. The myth is now considered the most pathetic story, but for them it is no longer sufficiently dramatic to provide a whole tragedy. The audience in particular has lost this sense for dialectical investigations that the Greeks enjoyed so much, while Seneca's plays are far too morbid and undramatic for 17th and 18th century spectators.

CORNEILLE : OEDIPE

Corneille wrote his Oedipe in 1659 after a silence of seven years caused by the failure of his Pertharite, Roi des Lombards (1651).⁴ During these years the Fronde des Princes as well as the war against Spain were responsible for a declining interest in theatre. But in 1659 the peace of the Pyrenees was concluded and refined tastes and a sense for preciousness were quickly increasing at court and with the nobility. Corneille was

⁴ Among the many critical studies on Corneille's Oedipe and other famous reinterpretations of the myth in French literature, I wish to mention two in particular to which I am indebted for some information on the background of these plays: R. Derche, Oedipe in Quatre mythes poétiques: Oedipe, Narcisse, Psyché, Lorelei (Paris: Société d'Éditions d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1962), pp. 10-69; H.G. Francq, Les malheurs d'Oedipe: Etude comparée de l'Oedipe de Corneille, Voltaire, Sophocle, Sénèque, Gide, Cocteau. Revue de l'Université Laval, 20 (1966), pp. 211-224, 308-317, 458-480, 560-569, 657-675.

writing his Oedipe at the request of superintendent Fouquet who, hoping for succession to Cardinal Mazarin, tried to win sympathies by giving his patronage to writers. The play became a great success as is shown, among other things, by the "liberalités" he received from King Louis XIV who attended a performance. On one side Corneille's aim was to revive the glory of a great man of the past as he says in his dedicatory "Vers présentés à Monseigneur le Procureur Général Fouquet":

Choisis-moi seulement quelque nom dans l'histoire
Pour qui tu veuilles place au temple de la Gloire
Quelque nom favori qu'il te plaise arracher
A la nuit de la tombe, aux cendres du bûcher.

Fouquet suggested three subjects, Corneille chose Oedipus, but he soon became aware of the difficulties he had to face in adapting Sophocles' and Seneca's tragedies if his play should earn him an immediate success. Horrors like the blinding of Oedipus "ferait soulever la délicatesse de nos dames", he writes in his preface "Au Lecteur", and so his hero will not appear on stage after his mutilation, although in previous plays he had not been afraid of presenting violent death on stage, as in Médée, and in Clitandre Dorise had blinded Pymante on stage with a hairpin.

On the other hand he realizes that without amour this play would not appeal to his audience; thus he introduces the love of Dircé and Thésée. Sophocles and Seneca had provided him with the basic plot, but it becomes in his play not much more than the starting point and background for his love intrigue. Dircé, a fictitious daughter of Laius, wants to marry Thésée, king of Athens, but Oedipus, her stepfather, will not allow this as he has already promised her to Aemon. The two plots - plague and love - are linked by the ghost of Laius who asks for a victim of his blood to be sacrificed. This seems to designate Dircé, or perhaps is it

Thésée, for suddenly he claims to be the son of Laius and Jocasta exposed to death as an infant because of the oracle. But then, according to the oracle, he also has to be the murderer of Laius which he vehemently denies, and his love for Dircé would become fraternal incest. The true facts are revealed as they were in the classical models, though more gradually, in two stages, and Oedipus and Jocasta meet again after he is known to be the murderer of her former husband, however she is not present at the final recognition.

A main difference between Corneille and Sophocles or Seneca is in the general atmosphere that has nothing of the terrifying anxiety and tension of Oedipus' inquiry. Nor does the reality of the plague and of death reach the court; in Sophocles the chorus of Theban elders had established this direct link between the king and the citizens always recalling his responsibility toward them. Corneille's characters are above all conscious of their royal power and privileges: Oedipus is the absolute monarch: "Je suis roi, je puis tout" (II, 1), he tells Dircé, and refuses to marry her to Thésée. Dircé considers herself the rightful inheritor of Laius, and the clash between these two royal figures shows how Corneille has added his sub-plot by creating a second character similar to the traditional hero, but more appealing to his audience. Honour, duty, and a glorious memory, such are the ideals explaining Dircé's readiness for sacrifice:

C'est ainsi qu'un trépas qui me comble d'honneur
Assure sa vengeance et fait votre bonheur,
Et que tout l'avenir chérira la mémoire
D'un châtiment si juste où brille tant de gloire.

(II, 3)

However, alone, a little later, she appears much more human as she reveals her dilemma, her duty and her love for Thésée.

Je meurs l'esprit content, l'honneur m'en fait la loi;

Mais j'aurais vécu plus contente,
Si j'avais pu vivre pour toi.

(III, 1)

But Oedipus himself remains throughout the play the mighty king, cold and haughty, who is not allowed to show any private feelings; once however he will admit to Jocasta:

Moi-même en cet état je ne puis me comprendre;
Et l'énigme du Sphinx fut moins obscur pour moi
Que le fond de mon coeur ne l'est dans cet effroi...⁵

(III, 4)

When he is revealed to be the murderer of Laius he will still insist on his divine authority that does not allow his people to judge him (V, I), and at the final recognition he remains calm, offering his life for the salvation of Thebes with a Stoic resignation. There is hardly any feeling of shame or horror, and the incest theme is also attenuated by Jocasta's absence, so that their last confrontation had ended with her dilemma:

La veuve de Laius est toujours votre femme,
Et n'oppose que trop, pour vous justifier,
A la moitié du mort celle du meurtrier.

(IV, 5)

The play ends with the brief report of Oedipus' blinding, a horror immediately counterbalanced by the sudden, miraculous disappearance of the plague, while it also indirectly points to the happy marriage of Thésée and Dircé.

Though we can no longer share the enthusiasm for Corneille's innovations, it is interesting to see how they are developed out of the myth itself and are linked to his time. There

⁵Cf. Seneca: "implicitum malum / magisque monstrum
Sphinge perplexum sua" (ll. 640-641).

is no doubt that his characters corresponded to the spirit of his audience, but through Thésée, who appears in the Oedipus at Colonus, and Dircé, the name of the wife of King Lycos of Thebes, changed into a fountain called by that name, the sub-plot becomes a more plausible addition. The problem of fraternal incest, creating a kind of sentimentality we cannot easily understand, was a traditional theme of pastoral literature. It draws the attention away from the maternal incest theme far less explicitly discussed. The love of Thésée and Dircé was of greater actuality in a time when the relation of politics and royal marriages was of primary importance. Sophocles' Oedipus had always been seen as a tragedy of destiny, and the quarrels of Jesuits and Jansenists gave to this aspect of the play a new interest. It was also important to take off all guilt from the royal characters, eventually Oedipus accuses Phorbas, the old Theban servant, for his disobedience to Laius, as much as his own destiny:

Le ciel l'avait prédit: vous avez achevé;
Et vous avez tout fait quand vous m'avez sauvé.

(V, 3)

And to excuse Jocasta's suicide Phorbas is accused of having given her an example by his own death (V, 8).

Thésée however, is clearly defending a "Molinist" tendency that Corneille himself owed to his Jesuit professors:

Le ciel, juste à punir, juste à récompenser,
Pour rendre aux actions leur peine ou leur salaire,
Doit nous offrir son aide, et puis nous laisser faire.

(III, 5)

How much the success of Corneille's Oedipe was linked to its time appears by the records of the Comédie Française where it was performed ninety-four times between 1681 and 1729, then,

eclipsed by Voltaire's Oedipe, it was never staged again.⁶

JOHN DRYDEN : OEDIPUS

Some twenty years after Corneille, John Dryden's Oedipus written in collaboration with Nathaniel Lee was performed in 1678-79 (the first and the third act are by Dryden). It is necessary to make a clear distinction between the play itself and Dryden's criticism. In his preface he writes, "Sophocles, indeed, is admirable everywhere; and therefore we have followed him as close as possibly we could."⁷ However, this is not very close. In an Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), Dryden defends the importance of the literary tradition, but he is also aware of necessary changes, for the "genius of every age is different".⁸ His comparative criticism of Sophocles, Seneca and Corneille has many good points, but with his play he proves how difficult adaptations are. He is right in objecting to Corneille's sub-plot, yet he commits the same error by introducing the love of Eurydice and Adrastus. He thinks the French Oedipe should have been a better man, but his own hero does not stand out at all, especially as his Creon - a Shakespearean villain like Richard III - creates another sub-plot taking even more attention from Oedipus. For him the effect of Seneca is too much in "pompous expression, pointed sentences, and philosophical notions", so he, transforming them into action,

⁶Cf. A. Joannidès, La Comédie Française de 1680 à 1920, Tableau des représentations par auteurs et par pièces (Paris: Plon, 1921).

⁷The Works of John Dryden, ed. Sir Walter Scott, 2nd ed. VI (Edinburgh, 1821), p. 126.

⁸An Essay of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Writings, ed. John L. Mahoney, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), p. 65.

brings the ghost of Laius on the stage! The effect is described by W. Scott in his introduction of the 1821 edition: "...when the play was revived about thirty years ago, the audience were unable to support it to an end; the boxes being all emptied before the third act was concluded. Among all our English plays, there is none more determinedly bloody than Oedipus."⁹ Indeed it ends with a general massacre of all the main characters and Oedipus jumping out of the window. Dryden had opposed the statuesque beauty of the French plays to a "lively imitation of Nature", more in the tradition of Shakespeare¹⁰, but unfortunately the result in this play are miraculous events and mere confusion. So it is not surprising that this work does not seem to have influenced later versions.

VOLTAIRE : OEDIPE

Voltaire became well acquainted with Dryden's work, but it is not sure whether he knew his Oedipus when he wrote his own tragedy, his first work, at the age of nineteen; it was performed in 1718 when he was twenty-four. Voltaire, who had studied Aristotles' Poetics and the tragic theories of his time, in particular Dacier, wanted to renew tragedy in France by rejecting the traditional love plots.¹¹ But for his first play the actors

⁹op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁰This is a recurrent idea in his comparison, see in particular, Essay of Dramatic Poesy, op. cit., p. 38.

¹¹Racine, in the preface of the 1676 edition of his Thébaïde, was defending the same view when he wrote: "Je suis persuadé que les tendresses ou les jalousies des amants ne sauroient trouver que fort peu de place parmi les incestes, les paricides et toutes les autres horreurs qui composent l'histoire d'Oedipe et de sa malheureuse famille."

simply refused such a revolutionary innovation, and he, too, had to introduce a sub-plot, this time between Jocasta and Philoctète who had loved each other a long time ago, before her marriage with Laius. Yet Voltaire admits himself in his fourth Lettre sur Oedipe (written in 1719)¹² that the Greek subjects provide material for one or two scenes only, never for a whole tragedy. Indeed his approach to the classical models is no blind admiration, and in his severe criticism of Sophocles he points out a considerable number of contradictions and vain declamations.

So it is not surprising that in spite of his criticism of Corneille's Oedipe he has in many respects followed him. In the first three acts of the play Oedipus can hardly be said to be at the centre of the action which turns almost entirely around Jocasta and her lover, who after the death of his friend Hercules has come back to Thebes to see her. For Voltaire, who found the opening scene of Sophocles too contrived, as Oedipus should have known these facts, this arrival offers a plausible reason for the introductory scenes. Philoctète hears about the plague, as well as of the murder of Laius, and of Jocasta's marriage to Oedipus. Very naturally the character of Jocasta, too, is much more developed; it appears that she never loved Laius and married Oedipus only because she had promised her suffering people that the victor over the sphinx would become her husband. Now that her only lover has just returned, he is accused of having murdered Laius - his rival -, and the Thebans ask for his sacrifice. Before Oedipus,

¹²The seven Lettres sur Oedipe (à M. de Genonville), 1719, "Ecrites en 1719, qui contiennent la critique de l'Oedipe de Sophocle, de celui de Corneille, et de celui de l'auteur."

the king, can allow this to be done, the gods have to be consulted, and only now Voltaire introduces the prophecy of Tiresias who is here actually identified with the High Priest. Voltaire had accused Sophocles of revealing the outcome of the tragedy right from the beginning in the seer's prophecy to Oedipus. He rearranges the plot so that the dramatic tension is maintained until the end. For this reason the anagnorisis takes place in two stages as it did in Corneille's tragedy. Sophocles, Voltaire says, has forgotten that Laius' murder is the first theme of the inquiry, and that the murderer's presence in Thebes is the reason for the plague, but after the opening scenes he never mentions the plague again. Nor is Oedipus explicitly proved to be the murderer of Laius and thus responsible for the suffering of his people: all his emphasis is on Oedipus' self-knowledge. Voltaire, on the contrary, shows his hero ready to sacrifice himself for his people when he understands that he has killed the former king; and he is on the point of leaving for exile when the messenger from Corinth arrives. The second part of the anagnorisis is brought about and the play ends with Jocasta stabbing herself after Oedipus' blinding has been announced. What happens to Philoctète is not mentioned and he does not appear again after the third act. Though Voltaire had established a plausible motive for his presence in Thebes, he has not been able to integrate his sub-plot fully into the traditional structure of the tragedy, and he admits this himself in the preface to a new edition in 1729: "Je gâtai ma pièce pour leur plaire en affadissant par des sentiments de tendresse un sujet qui le comporte si peu".¹³

¹³ Bibliothèque des Théâtres XXXII (Paris: Duchesne, 1784, p. 4.

He recognizes that the two Oedipus plays written in the meantime by M. de Folard (1722) and A. Houdar de la Motte (1726) avoided this mistake of his.

Corneille had left out the chorus altogether, but Dacier recommended that Voltaire reintroduce it in all his scenes. "C'était me conseiller de me promener dans les rues de Paris avec la robe de Platon,"¹⁴ and he prefers to have his chorus in a few scenes only, but without any choral odes. To write a new Oedipus was a great challenge for the young Voltaire, but he not only tried to improve on his predecessors, the play also offered him the opportunity for expressing some of his own political and religious ideas. His hero is not like that of Corneille, an absolute king, but rather an enlightened monarch who cares for his people, but there is no doubt that some of the statements were highly controversial in a play performed at the time of the Régence, like this one by Philoctète:

Un roi pour ses sujets est un dieu qu'on révère;
Pour Hercule et pour moi, c'est un homme ordinaire.

(II, 4)

Beside allusions to contemporary political situations many attacks against priesthood and religion were discovered, and they are all the more striking because of their epigrammatic formulation.

Thus one of Jocasta's couplets has become famous:

Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense;
Notre crédulité fait toute leur science.

(IV, 1)

In Sophocles, too, Jocasta expresses some doubts on oracles and priests, but never in the Greek playwright have the gods this

¹⁴ibid., p. 4

avenging character they have in Voltaire. In the Greek play life has been founded on illusion for Oedipus, but this proves the weakness of man's understanding rather than being a cause of rebellion against the injustice of the gods. Voltaire admits the existence of divine forces but severely judges them by human standards; in such a perspective man stands out virtuous, though helpless against the power of the immoral gods: "Le voilà donc rempli, cet oracle exécration ... Misérable vertu ... Un dieu plus fort que toi m'entraînait vers le crime." (V, 4) The gods' perfidious destruction of man's noble purposes proves them to be a power of evil for mankind. Thus, instead of the former attitude of awe toward the irrational aspect of fate, or of divine justice, or of simply avoiding the question by stressing the pathetic effect and the sub-plot, here the revolt of man against the gods is clear. Significantly the play ends with Jocasta saying just before she stabs herself: "J'ai fait rougir les dieux qui m'ont forcée au crime." (V, 5)

The play was a great success at its time because of its obvious relation to ancient and classic French tragedy in subject and style, and because it was nevertheless much closer to the spirit of Voltaire's time, in particular the rising libertinage among his audience.

At the end of the 18th century new Oedipus plays were written, less daring in allusions and more appropriate to the spirit of the French court where they were performed,¹⁵ but it was Voltaire's tragedy that was staged by the Comédie Française until the middle of the 19th century.

Not only in France had it become famous, but at the beginning of the 19th century Voltaire's plays were very popular

¹⁵The most remarkable is Oedipe chez Admète by Jean François Ducis (1778) who quite appropriately combines the Oedipus at Colonus with the myth of Alcestis.

in Germany, too. An interesting reaction to his Oedipe is A. Graf von Platen's treatment of the myth, Der romantische Ödipus (1828), a literary satire in the style of Aristophanes,¹⁶ mainly directed against the love intrigues in the French Oedipus plays, and ridiculing the projects for a very spectacular staging of Sophocles' tragedy by K. Immermann in Germany.¹⁷ This parody marks the end of the neo-classic versions characterized by inappropriate subplots, and the author has well understood that the distortion of the Greek myth in such an approach could not be pushed any further.

The Oedipus plays written after the Renaissance had one important characteristic in common: they were largely determined by the taste of the audience often restricted to the court, or the upper middle class. Their interest was not in an exact restoration of Greek tragedy, but in bringing the myth closer to their time; not only did the setting and general background of these new versions reflect their age and its tastes and preoccupations, but unfortunately the Greek tragic sense was lost as well. Only the new discovery of the essence of Greek tragedy could lead to valuable reinterpretations.¹⁸

¹⁶The equivalent to such an approach in this century is the satyr play by Alexis Curvers, Ce vieil Oedipe; see below, p. 132.

¹⁷see below, p. 41.

¹⁸Several 19th century Oedipus plays have been written but they are rather insignificant works and of no importance for 20th century reinterpretations; for a short historical survey of Oedipus treatments since Antiquity, cf. E. Frenzel, Stoffe der Weltliteratur. Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte (Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, 1962).

NEW INTEREST IN ANTIQUITY AND REVIVAL OF TRAGEDY

The treatment of classical myths in contemporary drama is a well-known phenomenon, generally associated with several of the most famous writers of this century, like A. Gide, J. Giraudoux, J. Cocteau, J.P. Sartre, J. Anouilh, H. von Hofmannsthal, G. Hauptmann, E. O'Neill, and a few others. The ancient myths that are used to express and illustrate new moral, philosophical and political ideas are approached in these works from what appears to be a completely new angle. But how did this movement come to start? A simple explanation accounting for all its widely different aspects is not possible. First of all it is more than a short-lived fashion in French literature only, as it is sometimes presented.¹ It has affected most Western literatures, German, English, American, Italian and Spanish.² On the other hand, it is not a new and unique phenomenon in literary history. The numerous examples of Oedipus works throughout the centuries are an example of the great influence that the classical tradition has had on Western literatures, its importance varying with the country and the period.

Thus, it is not possible to determine the influence of one single work or writer, or one specific reason, that could be seen as a starting point for the new approach. A great number of factors are involved, not all of them purely literary or dramatic, but part

¹This is an impression left by many of the innumerable North American articles and dissertations generally concerned with the use of myth in French drama only.

²The Scandinavian countries which have never been closely linked to Greco-Roman culture have hardly any works on classical themes (cf. R. Trousson. Un problème de littérature comparée: Les études de thèmes. Paris: Minard, 1968, p. 70). There are some examples in Eastern European literature, cf. M. Dietrich, "Antiker Mythos im modernen Drama", Das moderne Drama (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1963), p. 458-496.

of much vaster intellectual movements involving most of the discoveries and principles in the humanities of the 19th century. Positivism with its stress on objective and scientific methods, is, among many other things, responsible for a tremendous amount of thorough scholarship in historical, archaeological, and philological studies that increased the knowledge of the Ancient World in a degree never achieved before. The Renaissance and Baroque writers had far less information on life, politics, and religion in Greece and Rome at their disposal than contemporary writers have. It is worthwhile noticing that the playwrights and poets in our century dealing with ancient themes are with hardly any exception very well educated men, coming from schools where classical studies were still of primary importance. They were familiar with the Greco-Roman mythology literature and, as well as the neo-classic versions by Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Goethe, Hölderlin and Kleist, while they had also studied theories of tragedy and mythology.

Some plays clearly show that their authors were acquainted with the scholarly research on their subject, and in a few instances the dictionaries on classical antiquity may have been a source, too.

Nevertheless as literary works do not primarily aim at scientific reconstructions of the past, it is not surprising that the more subjective, truly original approaches have had a greater appeal to creative writers. The new theories on the meaning of the myths, of which Bachofen is one of the earliest and most prominent figures, is mainly a result of Romanticism and studies on folklore. The new interest in myth and its relation to history opened unknown perspectives of what was formerly rather contemptuously rejected as fairy-tales of primitive people. In literature mythology became an important source for symbolism, and this tendency to integrate imaginary beings for symbolic purposes was taken over in drama, too, and has become characteristic of reinterpreted mythological

themes, in particular the sphinx in the Oedipus myth.³ To the Greek tragedy itself new approaches have been taken by a few isolated men whose primary concern was no longer to please an audience with their plays, but who through their thinking tried to recapture a genuine understanding of Greek tragedy. In this respect F. Hölderlin has to be mentioned, though significantly only the 20th century has come to appreciate the truly Greek character of his translations of Antigone and König Ödipus (1804).⁴

The most influential thinker in the second half of the last century is without any doubt F. Nietzsche (1844-1900), who in and outside Germany had a tremendous impact on many writers, especially in the two decades before and after 1900. Beside his basic ideas, the "death" of God along with an aristocratic belief in the superman (Übermensch) in many ways related to a Wagnerian hero, the contempt of any weakness, which he considered to be a characteristic of Christianity, the reversal of all values, he also has a new theory on Greek tragedy in his Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872). All these are important in connection with the revival of tragedy. However controversial his ideas were, and because of their revolutionary moral aspect, they were discussed by all the intellectuals of that time.

In the literary field itself there were several facts, too, which explain the interest in Greek and Roman subjects in drama. In connection with von Platen, Karl Immermann's project of staging

³Other examples would be the eagle in A. Gide's Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, the bull in H. de Montherlant's Pasiphaé the horse in J. Cocteau's Orphée, and the appearance of the gods in Giraudoux' Amphytryon 38.

⁴cf. H. Frey, Deutsche Sophoklesübersetzungen: Grenzen und Möglichkeiten des Übersetzens am Beispiel der Tragödie "König Ödipus" von Sophokles (Winterthur: Keller, 1964), p. 161.

for the first time in Germany Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus (in the early 1830's)⁵ was mentioned; however he failed, and all he could achieve were dramatized recitals. This is a most surprising fact: the Greek plays, so much commented and studied especially since the Renaissance, were never staged in the original. Only adaptations as those by Corneille and Voltaire had been performed, but in spite of the enthusiasm and the admiration for Greek culture, the audience stressing its humanitarian aspects, was not ready to accept what appeared as gigantic, monstrous, elementary forces in the tragedians (just as they had to change Shakespeare). The largely classical education in the 19th century schools, where an ever increasing number of students became acquainted with the ancient works, as well as such outstanding scholarly approaches as that of August Wilhelm Schlegel whose lectures on dramatic art were published in 1809-1811, helped to change the attitudes. But it was not until 1841 that a Greek tragedy, Antigone, was first performed in Germany.⁶ It is Antigone, too, which was the first one to be performed in France, in 1844, at the Odéon.⁷

The dates of the early stagings of the Oedipus are significant for a movement both preliminary and parallel to the reinterpretations in the 20th century. In 1845, König Ödipus, as

⁵ see above p. 37.

⁶ With the exception of a few rare performances, generally recitals, during the Renaissance, this was the first performance North of the Alps; it took place in Potsdam, at the court of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia; more details can be found in the interesting account by W. Schadewaldt, "Antike Tragödie auf der modernen Bühne," in Hellas und Hesperiden (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1960), p. 543-570.

⁷ cf. Jacques Lacarrière, "Répertoire des mises en scène," in Sophocle (Paris: L'Arche, 1960), p. 135-138.

well as Ödipus auf Kolonos were performed in Germany, where however two more significant stagings followed, one in 1866, at the Meininger Bühne, which was typical of the time for its sense of historicity, and another one, in 1886, when it was put on stage by Adolf Wilbrandt at the Burgtheater in Vienna; it there became a great success and was performed thirty times before 1899.⁸ In France a translation by J. Lacroix was first performed at the Comédie Française, in 1858, but it was in 1880, with Mounet-Sully that it became one of the most famous stagings of the time: until his death in 1915 he played the title-part 274 times making it thus his Oedipe.⁹ In Greece it was first taken up again in 1868, at the Odéon of Herode Atticus,¹⁰ while in the English speaking world the Oedipus was first performed - in Greek - in the United States, in 1881 at the theatre of Harvard University, where it was welcomed with great enthusiasm as a great historical event: the first Greek tragedy on an Amercian stage.¹¹

This reception of Sophocles on the modern stage shows that the audience was ready for an understanding of Greek tragedy. One of the reasons why they liked Mounet-Sully's Oedipe-roi was the seriousness of the play as opposed to the vulgarity of the vaudeville¹² and the dreary naturalist drama of the time.

⁸cf. Schadewaldt, op. cit., p. 549-556; see below p. 66 .

⁹cf. A. Joannidès, La Comédie Française de 1860 à 1920: Tableau des représentations par auteurs et par pièces (Paris: Plon, 1921), s.v. Oedipe; and, Jean Valmy-Baysse, Naissance et vie de la Comédie Française (Paris: Librairie Fleury, 1945), p. 357.

¹⁰Lacarrière, op. cit., p. 137.

¹¹cf. Henry Norman, An Account of the Harvard Greek Play (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1882).

¹²Kindermann, Theatergeschichte Europas, Bd. VIII (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1970), p. 128-129.

Innumerable performances of Sophocles' Oedipus have followed in this century all over Europe, one of the most remarkable being at the beginning of the century Max Reinhardt's antinaturalist, gigantic performance at the Zirkus Schumann in Berlin.¹³

An absolute reproduction of the Greek original is of course never possible; there is no exact recording, of their performances, and the conditions, the society, our whole outlook has changed too much for such a reconstruction. As the plays are staged in translation, one of the crucial points is the language: how much freedom is allowed? In many stage translations the choruses, more than any other part, have been changed and adapted to modern theatre.¹⁴ This was at the same time a first step toward reinterpretations, and the need of translations for the stage gave the idea for new plays altogether. Without this new interest in Sophocles himself and the performance of the original versions that most of the later Oedipus writers were able to see, the very free adaptations would not so easily have become popular with them and their audience. For the Oedipus plays in our century this revival of tragedy was a starting point out of which, through Péladan's Oedipe et le Sphinx performed in Orange in 1903, the later interpretations will gradually develop.

Orange, this old provincial city in the South of France, famous for its Greek theatre, became at the end of last century a centre for the revival of tragedy in France. It must also be recalled that some twenty years earlier, Leconte de Lisle, the chief representative of the "Parnasse" and its return to classic beauty, in

¹³ Its impact went far beyond the borders of Germany as it was presented on a tour in many major European cities, Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Warsaw, Kiev, Odessa, Stockholm; cf. Kindermann, Bd. VIII & IX, s.v. Ödipus.

¹⁴ Cf. H. von Hofmannsthal's translation, König Ödipus (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1909), where the choral odes are split into dialogues between old Theban citizens; cf. also Schadewaldt, op. cit., p. 512-523, for more examples.

poetry, had also attempted a renewal of Greek drama with an adaptation of Aeschylus' trilogy of the Atreides (Les Erinyes, first performed in 1873), and later of Euripides' Ion (Apollonide). These not too successful re-creations play, nevertheless, an important role in the movement toward a renewal of Greek tragedy. Partly as a reaction against romantic drama, and the naturalist tendencies of the time with their social and political implications, and partly because of the historical and archaeological interest in the Greek theatres, a group of theorists and playwrights had later chosen the Provence to start a Renaissance of tragedy.¹⁵ Paul Mariéton and his disciple Gabriel Boissy were two of the most enthusiastic propagandists of this movement. Many discussions on the rules for the new type of tragedy followed, a considerable number of plays on subjects of Greek tragedy and mythology were staged, and even if hardly any of them are remembered today, the trend toward Antiquity which became famous between the two wars was foreshadowed here. The spirit of this early approach is still much more traditional, the heroic aspect of tragedy, presenting men greater than everyday people (as opposed to realist and naturalist drama), is stressed, while one of the characteristics of the later plays is anti-heroism. They do not however, ask for the strict observance of the famous unities as prescribed by French neo-classicism. Typical for the movement was the tremendous enthusiasm for the idea of the open-air theatre, for the crowded audiences that were compared to the Greek people gathering for the mysteries of Eleusis. Orange was proclaimed "la patrie ou le sanctuaire des poètes dramatiques de demain. D'Orange ils prendront leur essor."¹⁶ Such convictions were too optimistic; however

¹⁵ Cf. J. Ernest-Charles, "La Renaissance tragique," in *Le Théâtre des Poètes: 1850-1910* (Paris: Société d'Éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1910), p. 255-239.

¹⁶ Ernest-Charles, p. 257

great the momentary success it was a provincial movement with an uncritical audience, and it received little echo from Paris. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see Ernest-Charles' views written in 1910: he was sure of the eventual fruitful consequences of Orange; yet he was wrong in prophesying a poetic renewal of tragedy along with the new interest in ancient drama.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ernest-Charles, p. 256

J. PELADAN: OEDIPE ET LE SPHINX, AND NIETZSCHE

Orange is particularly related to Oedipe et le Sphinx¹ as it was performed there August 1st, 1903. Péladan was one of the most prominent figures in the Renaissance of tragedy and certainly the most original one. Convinced of his descent from a Babylonian king, he assumed the title of Sâr and professing a strict Catholicism with deep mystical tendencies, he believed in his divine mission to warn the people of his time of the decline of the Latin civilization. This is the subject of his main work, La Décadence Latine, in nineteen volumes, composed in a genre that he calls éthopée. His works are characterized by a strange occultism and eroticism as a reaction against the triumph of naturalism at the end of the 19th century. An extremely prolific writer, he was also the author of about fifty dramas of which, however, only a few were published and even fewer staged.

The most obvious difference between Péladan's Oedipe and the former Oedipus tragedies is in his choice of an earlier moment in the hero's life to be represented in the play. It is divided into three acts, almost three pageants: "La Route de Thèbes" (murder of Laius, and the departure of Oedipus for Thebes), "La veuve de Laius" (his funeral and the arrival of Oedipus in Thebes), and "L'énigme du Sphinx" (the victory over the Sphinx and the arrival of Oedipus leading to his wedding with Jocasta and his proclamation as King of Thebes). Though all these events are part of the myth, they were not taken up in the

¹The play first appeared in a private edition, Oedipe et le Sphinx. Tragédie selon Sophocle. Pour servir de prologue à L'Oedipe-roi. Théâtre de la Rose+Croix VI (Beauvais: Imprimerie professionnelle, 1897). The second, slightly abridged version is the one referred to here, if not stated otherwise: Oedipe et le Sphinx. Tragédie en trois actes. Texte conforme à la représentation du 1er août 1903 au théâtre antique d'Orange (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1903).

classical tragedies, which makes the sub-title of the 1897 edition somewhat paradoxical: "Tragédie selon Sophocle. Pour servir de prologue à l'Oedipe-roi." Prologue indeed, but Péladan's play ends long before Sophocles' tragedy started, so in what sense can he call it, "selon Sophocle," and how can it be a tragedy, as it ends with the happiest moment of Oedipus' life?

To understand Péladan's attitude toward Sophocles, it is best to see how he himself looked at his relation to the Greek tragedians. Before Oedipe et le Sphinx, he had already written a trilogy on a Greek tragic theme, La Prométhéide (1896). It is the realization of an ambitious project, for Péladan was convinced that he was the man who could restore the two missing parts of the Aeschylean tragedy, and to a fairly literal translation of Prométhée enchaîné, he added what had been supposedly lost forever: Prométhée Porteur de Feu, and Prométhée délivré. "J'ai tendu l'arc d'Ulysse, j'ai retrouvé l'art d'Eschyle; j'ai refait les deux volants manquants ..." ² However this achievement was not universally recognized. Yet to the greatest disappointment of the unrecognized genius, the Comédie Française refused to stage it.

As soon afterwards Péladan became an enthusiastic promoter of the ancient theatres in the South of France, he was more successful with his Oedipe, staged in Orange in 1903. This was a slightly shortened version of the 1897 edition where the play opens with the Theban and the Corinthian shepherd; meeting at the cross-road just before the murder of Laius, they recall the past, the exchange of Oedipus, the baby. The Theban shepherd who watches him murder Laius, will afterwards warn Jocasta; he thus becomes

²Quoted from René-Louis Doyon, La Douleur Aventure de Péladan (Paris: La Connaissance, 1946), p. 149; this work is afterwards quoted as Doyon.

the only foreboding to the real tragedy as it was presented in Sophocles.³ By the time of the first edition Péladan probably had still a trilogy in the fashion of his Prométhéide in mind, so that his own "prologue", together with the two Sophocles plays, could have represented on stage, almost the entire life of Oedipus. The lost trilogy on the Oidipodeia by Aeschylus justified such a project. The 1903 version however, is no longer called prologue, and as an independent play, especially if the audience were not familiar with the myth, the effect must have been puzzling. Although there is far more action than in Sophocles, the murder of Laius and the colloque with the sphinx in particular, the character of Oedipus still dominates the play.

The conflict of free will and destiny is the theme of the opening scene where Oedipus, in a gloomy mood, revolts against the terrible oracle he has just heard in Delphi. This is the problem that obsesses him all through the play, and which at the end seems resolved. Like Seneca, Péladan starts with a man who feels condemned by the gods:

En vain, je déteste le crime; Apollon m'y condamne!
 Mon cerveau ne le conçoit pas; ma main l'accomplira!
 Dérision Olympienne! (I, 1)

But instead of adopting a hopeless resignation, this extremely irascible character, passionately enraged against such an injustice, will react violently, as he foretells his friend Lychas:

³Minor changes consist in replacing Oedipus' long monologue at the beginning by a dialogue with Lychas, a friend from Corinth; Creon, very shortly appearing in the first edition, is left out altogether in the second one.

... Ma colère est terrible!
 Malheur à qui voudrait me barrer le chemin.
 Obéis, disparaïs, si tu tiens à la vie,
 car je suis furieux, et je te frapperais.

(I, 1)

At this moment, he cannot endure the slightest contradiction, and the murder of his father and the servants is only the fatal explosion of his terrible anger. He almost feels relieved afterwards, and as innocent as Voltaire's character at the end of his play:

Contemple ton ouvrage, Dieu des vengeances,
 car je n'ai rien voulu de tout ce que j'ai fait
 dans ce sinistre carrefour:
 mon bras servit d'épée à ta rancune obscure.

(I, 5)

Yet the future hero that Oedipus is going to become in the rest of the play can also feel that this damnation by the gods through the oracle has established a secret and strong link between him and the divine powers; he is not an ordinary mortal being as he tells Laius:

... L'homme au char, regarde-moi bien:
 je ne suis pas un mortel ordinaire.
 Les Dieux ont des desseins sur moi.

(I, 4)

In the second act where the action has moved to Thebes, the first part describes the double suffering of the city mourning for its dead king and praying for deliverance from the sphinx. It is a dilemma for Jocasta who has to choose between knowing either the murderer of her husband or the city's liberator from the sphinx, for Tiresias is ready to reveal only one of them. Eventually she concedes to the prayers of the citizens, and even promises to marry the one who will destroy the sphinx, but he has to do it before that very night. Although this episode is not included in the classical tragedies, there are some interesting similarities

showing that Péladan did not ignore them in his treatment. The ambiguous prophecies of Tiresias correspond to the oracle at the opening of the Oedipus Tyrannus, the prayers of Jocasta are close to the first choral ode in Sophocles, and the calamity of the sphinx echoes the plague in the Greek tragedy. Even Oedipus himself, at his arrival, sympathizing with the suffering people recalls the opening scene of Sophocles.

If the first act was dominated by the idea of destiny, this one leads to a glorification of the human will in Oedipus' "hymne de volonté":

La pure volonté l'emporte donc sur la fatalité.
 Hier, j'errais accablé et maudit;
 la gloire du héros aujourd'hui m'environne.
 Hier, je renonçais le sceptre de Corinthe;
 je reçois celui de Thèbes, maintenant.

(II, 9)

When Oedipus actually meets Jocasta and sees the prize for the victory, he is convinced that he will be the expected hero who will kill the sphinx. From that moment onward, he will not have the slightest doubts about his own tremendous powers. This absolute confidence in himself then leads to his triumph in the third act where his only fear is that the sphinx may not appear; because he is not afraid, he is able to destroy her. By his will, he has defeated the oracle:

O recommencement heureux de mon destin,
 Oracle conjuré, innocence conquise,
 et de la volonté, admirable succès!

(III, 5)

But, if thus the oracle is proved to have been wrong, this does not at all mean that the gods are liars. He makes the distinction between oracle and destiny on one hand, and justice of the gods realized through human willpower on the other. At the

end, his conflict of the opening scene seems to have found its ideal solution, and he himself feels changed into a god:

La volonté c'est la divinité dans l'homme!

 Ne désespérez donc jamais du sort:
 la justice est l'âme des Dieux,
 et la prière qu'ils exaucent toujours,
 ô Thébains! c'est l'effort!

(III, 5)

Not only does the traditional myth reveal this ending to be a climax of tragic irony, in the play itself, so many points are left in their ambiguity, that they undercut the apparent movement toward a happy solution of all the problems. Throughout the play, beside the Delphic oracle and Tiresias' foretellings, there is a strong prophetic quality foreboding events beyond those told in the play. In the first act, the mutual cursing of Laius and Oedipus is announcement of both the Oedipus Tyrannus and the war between his sons:

Laius : Sois maudit dans tes fils, si tu engendres;
 du foyer qu'ils te chassent et qu'entre eux ils
 s'égorgent.

Oedipe : Sois maudit dans ta couche, si tu as une épouse;
 que le malheur sur ton seuil s'accroupisse ...

(I, 5)

In this scene Oedipus has had a secret warning he should not kill Laius, while in the second and third acts, Péladan stresses this immediate and mysterious attraction of Jocasta and Oedipus for each other that Freud would relate to an unconscious recognition of mother and son. But in 1897, Péladan could not possibly have known these theories.⁴ To strengthen this effect, he has changed the traditional sequence of events and introduced a

⁴Cf. Hofmannsthal, see below, p. 72.

meeting between the two before Oedipus leaves for his contest with the sphinx. Jocasta cannot help remembering her supposedly dead baby, as well as Laius when she sees him (II, 10).

On Oedipus, the effect is just as strong:

A peine l'ai-je vue, que sitôt je la sentis chère.
Je n'éprouvai pas le désir qu'éveille la beauté,
mais un penchant plus profond et plus calme.

(III, 1)

These words are almost exactly echoed by Jocasta coming to see the result of the fight against the sphinx (III, 5).

Péladan in his Science de l'amour,⁵ insisted on the spiritual, Platonic aspect of love, and considered it also, as in this play, as a source of tremendous strength and energy. Oedipus, from his earlier dejection, has changed into a superhuman hero, and love is, for Jocasta, a source of exuberant joy of life into which her mournings have been reversed. Yet, Péladan was aware of the deceiving power of love when he wrote: "L'Amour est cette volonté qui tente de donner ou de recevoir l'illusion de l'Absolu."⁶ Oedipus' victory seems indeed to be a conquest of the "Absolu", but is it not extreme hybris when he boasts of his godlike strength? Jocasta had warned him before he left for the sphinx: "Il y faut un mandat du ciel" (II, 10), and even if he was sent by heaven, what was to be the ultimate consequence?

Here the symbolism of the sphinx becomes an essential part, and as it is one of the characteristics of the 20th century versions to have included and transformed this episode, it is important to see the first treatment it received in this century, which at least is responsible for the idea itself taken up in different ways by

⁵La Science de l'amour. Amphithéâtre des sciences mortes, VII, (Paris: A. Messein, 1911).

⁶La Science de l'amour; here quoted from Doyon, p. 211.

later playwrights. Péladan describes the sphinx as, "Cette panthère au visage, aux mamelles de femme/ et dont l'intelligence confond celle de l'homme" (II, 5), living in a high rocky cave with bones of victims scattered all around. Most probably Péladan, who places the scene in the middle of the night, intended his audience to catch only an indistinct glimpse of this daring stage effect. All the stress is on the discussion between Oedipus and the sphinx in which four steps, or four enigmas, can be distinguished. The first one is the traditional riddle to which the answer is "man", and Oedipus has no problem in resolving it. The second one is the sphinx itself and the secret is to resist her horror; her nature had already been described by Tiresias: the corruption of the heart of the Theban citizens as well as their curse on the plague-stricken Chalcidians are responsible for the monster (II, 5). Oedipus, too, sees in her an Erinyes, but not being a Theban himself, he attributes to himself the godlike power to expiate the Theban sin. He forgets that he is nevertheless a human being, a man, the solution of the first riddle. Then the sphinx tries a different method; she wants to seduce him: "la véritable énigme, crois-le, c'est mon baiser." Oedipus resists and boastfully claims he himself is the enigma. And this is the very oracle he does not understand in spite of the sphinx explaining it to him in terms as clear as those of the Sophoclean Tiresias or the Delphic oracle:

Mon vainqueur sera le plus malheureux des mortels.
 Les mains rougies dans le sang de son père,
 il ira se coucher dans le lit de sa mère,
 et il engendrera dans la chair où il fut engendré.

(III, 2)

But Oedipus is far too intoxicated by his heroic mission to pay any attention to this. In the name of Apollo, he dissolves her, and the play ironically ends with him and Jocasta sitting on the sphinx' rock, now their royal throne.

Péladan had been much interested in Oriental mythology and its hermetic meaning. After a journey to Palestine and Egypt in 1898, he had written one of his most interesting books, La Terre du Sphinx⁷, the first part of a series he entitled, Les Idées et les Formes. It seems that he did not make a distinction between the Egyptian and the Greek sphinx, so that his ideas in this book can be associated with his Oedipe. He imagines himself having a meeting, a colloque, or a "Dialogue avec un double", with the sphinx, he wants to know the truth about his own activities as a magus. The sphinx has to tell him that what he is doing is but vain, superficial rituals, that his mission is probably a failure "... Tu as fait un rêve d'orgueil dans le bien, rien qu'un rêve!"⁸ This is exactly what happened to Oedipus, and the warnings the sphinx gives Péladan correspond to the nature of Oedipus' character, too: "Si ton maître t'a donné l'exemple incarné de rester homme, à quel titre toi, homme, veux-tu ébaucher en toi une divinité douteuse?"⁹ Péladan needs a remarkable lucidity and honesty to judge his own situation in such a "colloquy" with the sphinx. But unfortunately, he was unable to give up his former attitudes, and like Oedipus, he prefers a life of illusions ignoring the insights of the sphinx: her enigma remains hidden for both, in spite of the apparent solution.

In an incomplete short passage entitled "La Vérité", Péladan returns to this problem of man who cannot endure harsh reality and prefers to live in the illusion of his dreams and his love, perhaps it is the only truth he can live with:

⁷ Paris: Flammarion, 1899.

⁸ La Terre du Sphinx, p. 47.

⁹ Quoted from Doyon, p. 170.

Quelle est cette chose indicible, attribut du divin, devise de l'humain, que tous appellent, qui les confondrait tous, objet de la science et honneur de l'esprit, et cependant mère des épouvantes, source du désespoir et mort des passions? Oedipe répondit:

La Vérité ...

Elle est un nom de Dieu; elle est le voeu de l'homme qui la repousse, se condamne et se perd dans le flot incessant de l'instinct...

La vérité de l'homme, c'est son rêve, et celle de l'amour, un délicieux aveuglement. Il faut rêver sa vie et ingénuer sa tendresse.¹⁰

The strict simplicity of the Greek tragedy was incompatible with the introduction of such fantastic, chimeric beings as the sphinx. According to Aristotle, epic poetry rather than tragedy should contain marvelous events.

The plot should not consist of inexplicable incidents; as far as possible it should contain nothing inexplicable. If this is not possible, the inexplicable should lie outside the part of the story that is dramatized, like Oedipus' ignorance of the manner in which Laius died, and not to be in the play itself ... (Poetics 1460 a)

If the perfection of the plot and the avoidance of inconsistencies were some points where Corneille, Dryden and Voltaire tried to improve on Sophocles, some of the contemporary playwrights, like Péladan, are not afraid of breaking these classical rules by introducing, on stage, a hybrid being like the sphinx. If there is no unity of place, the play evolves however, within a reasonably short time, from the murder of Laius to his funeral and the immediately following victory over the sphinx.

But how could Péladan justify breaking off the play with the union of Oedipus and Jocasta? He himself, in his Origine et Esthétique de la tragédie¹¹ admits that his new approach to Greek tragedy is not entirely his own original idea:

¹⁰Doyon, pp. 238-239.

¹¹Paris: Sansot, 1904.

La culture occidentale commence à découvrir l'hellénisme. Il n'y a pas longtemps, elle tenait compte de Sénèque le tragique et nommait Voltaire après Corneille et Racine ... Entre le chant du bouc du VIIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ et Cinna par ex., il y a vraiment un abîme; et le premier qui l'ait mesuré est ce fameux Nietzsche ..."¹²

He has read his Geburt der Tragödie (1872) in a French translation,¹³ and the enthusiasm of a Catholic mystic for Nietzsche who saw in Christianity nothing but the weakness of a declining mankind and considered his new god, Dionysus, to be the Antichrist, is quite surprising. This judgement on Nietzsche shows the crucial importance he had in changing the attitudes toward Greek tragedy, and that reinterpretations in the 20th century cannot merely be seen as a continuation of the Renaissance and neo-classic revival. To see what this influence really amounted to, Nietzsche's main ideas on tragedy have to be considered first. Though by no means all of them have been illustrated in Péladan's Oedipe, their echoes can be seen in one form or another in later interpretations of the myth.

¹²Origine et Esthétique de la tragédie, p. 29.

¹³Though the complete translation appeared only in 1898, after he had written his Oedipe ..., Péladan could by that time be well informed on Nietzsche through partial translations and studies in French magazines; cf. J. Wilhelm, Friedrich Nietzsche und der französische Geist, (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 1939), p. 41.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE : DIE GEBURT DER TRAGÖDIE
AUS DEM GEISTE DER MUSIK¹⁴

It is well known that Nietzsche founded his approach to Greek art on the distinction of Dionysian and Apollinian elements. Music, wild enthusiasm and delirium represent the Dionysian aspect, while sculpture and an aesthetic pleasure, dream and illusion, are the world of Apollo. If for many centuries, and especially in German classicism (Winckelmann, Lessing) only the Olympian, serene perfection of form had been admired, Nietzsche claims that pure Apollinian "naive" art is very rare, and that it always has to be founded on the overcoming of terrible suffering. He opposes to the traditional view on Greek "Heiterkeit" the story of the Silen who told King Midas: "Das Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich bald zu sterben."¹⁵ (This Greek commonplace is stated by Oedipus, too, after his blinding.) Thus for Nietzsche, it is because of the terrible suffering that the Greeks needed the Olympian gods to hide the dreadful foundation of all reality. In Greek art, the Dionysian and Apollinian forces, after a continual struggle and mutual destruction,

¹⁴Published in 1872; in 1885 Nietzsche added a "Selbstkritik" to what he then considered a very youthful work though he still agreed with its basic ideas, but he renamed it after having lost his hope for renewal through Richard Wagner's music: Die Geburt der Tragödie, oder Griechentum und Pessimismus. The text here used is included in Werke in Drei Bänden (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954), I, 7-134, all further page references are given to this edition.

¹⁵Die Geburt der Tragödie, p. 30

finally reached their reconciliation in Attic tragedy.¹⁶ His assumption on its origin: the tragic chorus of satyrs, servants of Dionysus, is the starting point from which he develops his theory on tragedy and its evolution. For him it had primarily a religious function where myth and the cult of Dionysus were closely associated, and he believed that even in its most perfect form, tragedy always represented the sufferings of Dionysus himself under the mask of a great hero.¹⁷ His ideas on the interrelation of Dionysian and Apollinian forces in tragedy, and their effect on the audience are very complex and highly ritualistic. Basically he distinguishes between two levels of reality in the dramatic action:¹⁸ the (Dionysian) chorus and its (Apollinian) vision, the actual happenings on stage. It is through the effect of the Dionysian chorus and their participation in the Apollinian vision represented by the action of tragedy, that the Greek spectators, suffering at first like the satyrs from their insights in the destructive forces of the universe, will be saved. Through Dionysian art alone they can be liberated from a passive resignation in the ugly and absurd reality of life. By nature the Greeks are pessimists, as he stresses in the second sub-title he gave his work, Griechentum und Pessimismus, but through the Dionysian effect of tragedy their own existence, as that of the satyrs, is annihilated; they feel absorbed in the womb of nature and acquire an exuberant force of life. Thus, both the Apollinian and Dionysian aspects are necessary, and their reconciliation alone can achieve the effect of tragedy:

¹⁶ Until Euripides; then the power of the myth was destroyed under the influence of the rationalist principles of Socrates who tried to explain everything and inaugurated the scientific spirit against which Nietzsche was revolting in his own positivist and bourgeois time: cf. p. 35.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 53.

... (wir) haben die griechische Tragödie als den dionysischen Chor zu verstehen, der sich immer von neuem wieder in einer apollinischen Bilderwelt entladet. Jene Chorpartien, mit denen die Tragödie durchflochten ist, sind also gewissermassen der Mutterschoss des ganzen sogenannten Dialogs, d.h. der gesamten Bühnenwelt, des eigentlichen Dramas. In mehreren aufeinanderfolgenden Entladungen strahlt dieser Urgrund der Tragödie jene Vision des Dramas aus: die durchaus Traumerscheinung und insofern epischer Natur ist, andererseits aber, als Objektivation eines dionysischen Zustandes, nicht die apollinische Erlösung im Scheine, sondern im Gegenteil das Zerschneiden des Individuums und sein Einswerden mit dem Ursein darstellt. Somit ist das Drama die apollinische Versinnlichung dionysischer Erkenntnisse und Wirkungen und dadurch wie durch eine ungeheure Kluft vom Epos abgetrennt. (p. 52)

Though Nietzsche's theories were welcomed with great enthusiasm by many poets,¹⁹ hardly any one would follow all the steps of his arguments, and the difficulties or obscurities that result from their application in the writing of a tragedy can be seen in R. Pannwitz' Die Befreiung des Oidipus. Nevertheless, if not Nietzsche's whole theory, at least his "discovery" of the Dionysian quality of tragedy is largely responsible for a rejection of the neoclassic views in the reinterpreted Greek myths in this century.

In his own interpretation of Oedipus Nietzsche has made another distinction characteristic for a general trend in the recent approaches to ancient heroic and mythological figures. It is the difference between characters as they are presented by the tragedians, with an Apollinian mask, and the deeper, most frightful

¹⁹ rather than philologists! Wilamowitz in particular was violently attacking them in a reply he entitled Zukunftsphilologie.

reality of the myth itself behind them. The literary works rather than the myths themselves used to be studied and imitated. For Nietzsche, the image that Sophocles gives us of Oedipus is one side of his tragedy only, the moral and Apollinian aspect. He puts all his effort in the construction of a perfect plot which the Greek spectators enjoyed solving. But it should never be forgotten that this superior serenity over the whole work is only hiding the monstrous, preceding events that had led to this situation:

Wenn wir mit dieser Erklärung dem Dichter gerecht geworden sind, so kann immer noch gefragt werden, ob damit der Inhalt des Mythos erschöpft ist: und hier zeigt sich, dass die ganze Auffassung des Dichters nichts ist als eben jenes Lichtbild, welches uns, nach einem Blick in den Abgrund, die heilende Natur vorhält. Ödipus der Mörder seines Vaters, der Gatte seiner Mutter, Ödipus der Rätsellöser der Sphinx! Was sagt uns die geheimnisvolle Dreiheit dieser Schicksalstaten?²⁰

This passage contains two important points. The return to what happened before the opening of the tragedy is a tendency reflected in Péladan and other 20th century dramatists, it is an effort to explain the characters and the process that led to the situation of the tragedy itself. The other interesting idea is his particular attitude to Oedipus; it is striking that a description of the victory over the sphinx, a decisive moment in Oedipus' life, cannot be found in Greek literature. The brief allusions do not tell what happened after he had pronounced the key word, and the numerous visual representations are not more revealing on this point.²¹ Seneca did not miss the opportunity to recall the sphinx episode to add another monstrosity, but there is no indication of how the sphinx was destroyed.

²⁰ Die Geburt der Tragödie, p. 56

²¹ M. Delcourt, Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant. Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège (Paris, 1944), p. 105.

Nietzsche does not mention the Delphic oracle, but he considers the sphinx as the crucial point of the myth. According to an old Persian belief, a magus could only be the child of an incestuous relationship; vice-versa, for Nietzsche, the monstrosities of the parricide and of the incest could only be committed by a man of unnatural wisdom who was able to solve the riddle of nature and to destroy a hybrid being like the sphinx. However strange this explanation may appear, especially as Oedipus kills his father before he triumphs over the sphinx, which excludes a logical cause-effect relation, the approach through the sphinx is interesting as it has become an essential part of most contemporary Oedipus treatments, in the works of Péladan, Hofmannsthal, Cocteau, and in a different way in those of Gide, Ghéon, Croiset, W. H. Auden, and even Pannwitz.

Though Péladan was familiar with Nietzsche, the influence is not a simple one. In spite of the similarity of ideas in the associations with the sphinx, his play does not resemble the Greek tragedy as it is described by Nietzsche. The omnipresent chorus, the very essence of his theory, is missing, except for the funeral and triumphant choirs (rather than chorus) that do not participate in the action. Péladan was no mere imitator; he rewrote the Geburt der Tragödie in his own Origine et Esthétique de la tragédie where, following the general arguments of his German model, he gives the Dionysian aspect a peculiar twist in accordance with his personal basic ideas. Both theories are the product of very original minds, not too clear for outsiders. On several basic points Péladan contradicts Nietzsche: instead of Apollo and Dionysus, he distinguishes Demeter (the Christian Mater Dolorosa) and Dionysus,²² pain and joy, this time merging in the mysteries of

²²Origine et Esthétique de la tragédie, p. 9.

Eleusis which, rather than the dithyramb or the tragic chorus becomes the origin of tragedy. If Nietzsche opposes the myth to its literary expression, Péladan insists on the importance of ideas behind the aesthetic forms, on the meaning of tragedy so much neglected by the traditional approaches.²³ The key words of his theory are, "la loi du devenir, volonté, individu, immortalité, permanence du moi", ideals that explain the attitudes of his Oedipe: by his will he will eventually triumph over ananke.²⁴ A basic idea he shares with Nietzsche is the refusal of resignation which in spite of a cruel destiny allows momentary triumphs, whether by will-power or Dionysian exuberance. Nietzschean theories justified Péladan to call his Oedipe a tragedy and to give his prologue in isolation. That he nevertheless believed in a final "Christian" salvation for Oedipus similar to that of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, he has explained in his Origine et Esthétique de la tragédie. There is never excessive arrogance in Oedipus' confidence in his actions, on the contrary, the gods eventually save the man, who through his efforts has done all he could to avoid his destiny:

Pris dans un réseau presque inextricable de lois inconnues, certain seulement de sa naissance et de sa mort, l'homme antique découvre en même temps que son imperfection sérielle, la puissance de sa volonté opposable aux pires événements. Fils très pieux, Oedipe devient parricide et inceste sans cesser un instant sa piété filiale. En vain, il se couvre de crimes, il ne les a pas voulus, il les déteste, il est donc innocent. Ses actes, et quels actes! l'accusent sans le convaincre: la vertu qu'il a créée dans son coeur l'emportera sur le fait réel, car cette vertu intérieure ne cesse à aucun moment; il fuit Corinthe pour rester pur, il fuira Thèbes pour la purifier, et un jour l'ananké rectrice des

²³ *ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 39.

grands Dieux cédera devant une conscience humaine:
la mort elle-même, l'immuable mort, changera
d'aspect, et n'aura plus de nom, terrassée non
sous le poing d'un demi-dieu, mais sous la volonté
d'un éphémère!

Péladan's sympathy for Oedipus' destiny is undeniable, but in spite of his new approach to the myth, his tragedy remains too much in the spirit of a prologue only. Yet seen in the context of its author's ideas, it becomes an interesting example of the revived interest in Greek tragedy, and cannot be ignored as a starting point in 20th century reinterpretations of Oedipus.

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL: ÖDIPUS UND DIE SPHINX

Péladan's play became the starting point for a German play of the same title, Ödipus und die Sphinx, by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1906).¹ In 1904 he writes from Venice: "Ich wollte hier Jedermann anfangen, da fiel mir ein französisches Stück Ödipus und die Sphinx in die Hände, und der Stoff gefiel mir so sehr, dass ich sogleich anfang, das gleiche zu machen."² In the same letter he mentions his plan for a trilogy: he intends to give an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus and add an Oedipus-Greis in one act. Already in January 1904 he had planned an Oedipus at Colonus, and though he mentions the completion of this epilogue, it was never staged and can no longer be found. The trilogy was not completed, but Ödipus und die Sphinx, started in Venice, was finished in 1905 and first performed in Berlin on February 2nd, 1906 under Reinhardt's direction, who also staged separately the second part, König Ödipus, for the first time in 1910.³

Hofmannsthal's Ödipus und die Sphinx can only be understood in the context of his whole work. This aristocratic Viennese had not much in common with Péladan, except perhaps his anti-naturalist tendencies in literature. In him the old Austrian traditions and a perfect European culture were admirably combined. This man, aware of an imminent cultural crisis, had shown in his

¹Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1906; all page indications given in the text refer to this edition.

²Briefe 1900-1909, No. 129, to Richard Beer-Hofmann, 21 Sept. 1904 (Wien, 1937).

³König Ödipus. Neu übersetzt (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1910).

earlier, mostly lyric works - short plays and poetry - his affinity with new Romanticism and Symbolism. If for his later works, like the Jedermann and Das Salzburger grosse Welttheater, he draws on medieval morality and mystery plays, and on Calderon, he has often gone back throughout his life to themes of classical Antiquity. But the use he makes of these sources is never blind imitation; his purpose is not to reconstruct the past but to make it part of himself and of his time. For him the value of these old masterpieces is their universal human quality, and he is not afraid of developing certain aspects according to his own ideas and preoccupations. As early as 1895 he describes his attitude toward history as:

ein gewisser historischer Sinn, das heisst eine gewisse Keckheit, die Dinge höchst unhistorisch anzuschauen, Fernes auf Nahes, Kleines auf Grosses zu beziehen und in einem starken Glauben ans Menschliche in allem Vergangenen etwas schlechterdings Begreifliches aufzufinden.⁴

He is always aware of our indebtedness to tradition, and especially to Antiquity as the basis for our Western civilization:

... der Geist der Antike ... ist unser Denken selber; es ist das, was den europäischen Intellekt geformt hat ... Es ist kein angehäufter Vorrat, der veralten könnte, sondern eine mit Leben trachtige Geisteswelt in uns selber: unser wahrer innerer Orient, offenes, unverwesliches Geheimnis.⁵

How much he himself has drawn on this heritage is shown by his numerous works on classical, mostly Greek themes. The major ones are, beside the two Oedipus works, Alkestis (1893)

⁴Briefe, 1890-1901, No. 154, (Berlin, 1935).

⁵"Vermächtnis der Antike", Prosa IV, Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1959), pp. 316-317.

a Vorspiel zur Antigone des Sophokles (1900), Elektra (1902), for which Richard Strauss wrote the music as well as for the later librettos, Ariadne auf Naxos (1912) and Die Aegyptische Helena (1923). While Hofmannsthal was working on his Elektra, who in his play became a hysteric, frenzied woman typical for his over-sensitive generation, he had planned to write an "Orestes in Delphi", an episode that had not been treated by any one of the Greek tragedians. This quality of novelty as well as the theme of the innocent man's involuntary guilt through his apparently positive actions, must have appealed to him in Péladan's play, and he dropped his Orestes' project. It is significant that his approach to the Greek Oedipus comes through a modern work. That his source is never just one work, but an association of a vast literary tradition, appears in his attitude toward Electra, after he had read Sophocles' tragedy:

Sogleich verwandelte sich die Gestalt dieser Elektra in eine andere. Auch das Ende stand sogleich da: dass sie nicht mehr weiterleben kann, dass, wenn der Streich gefallen ist, ihr Leben ... ihr entstürzen muss ... Die Verwandtschaft und der Gegensatz zu Hamlet waren mir auffallend. Als Stil schwebte mir vor, etwas Gegensätzliches zur "Iphigenie" zu machen ...⁶

But even if Sophocles did not give him the immediate idea for his play, there is no doubt that he was well acquainted with the classical model.⁷ Most probably he had seen König Ödipus which had been staged thirty times by Wilbrandt at the Burgtheater in Vienna between 1886 and 1899.⁸ During a stay in Paris in 1900,

⁶Aufzeichnungen, Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag), p. 131.

⁷In 1895, while at university, he attended lectures by Alfred von Berger on his Dramaturgie der antiken Tragiker; cf. W. Volke, H. von Hofmannsthal, Rororo (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967) p. 52.

⁸W. Schadewaldt, op. cit., p. 550

he had attended a performance of the Oedipe-roi at the Comédie Française. It is also an interesting coincidence that the Provence which he had visited in the 1890's had suggested to him, as to Péladan and other French writers of that time, a direct link with Greek tragedy:

Im Innern aber ist die provenzalische Landschaft eintönig, wie die griechische ... Dann und wann auf der staubigen alten königlichen Strasse eine Schafherde, die lautlos weitertrippelt ... Dann weite, schattenlose Haine der mageren Oliven. So hat es rings um den Engpass ausgesehen, wo Ödipus dem Vater begegnete. So um den Hügel, wo Antigone den Leichnam des Bruders besuchte. Hier hat der heutige Tag kein Eigenleben. Die Vergangenheit ist noch immer. Und es war ganz im Stile der Natur, als vor ein paar Jahren die Comédie Française nach Orange kam, um in provenzalischer Natur und auf dem steinernen Gerüst einer antiken Bühne den König Ödipus zu spielen ...⁹

The impression and the associations that this play called to his mind are characteristic of his ability to create an atmosphere for his plays: the action and the characters are always surrounded by a corresponding background, by a Stimmung.

At first Hofmannsthal did not intend to write an entire tragedy on the subject suggested by Péladan, but "ein kurzes hymnenartiges lyrisches Drama, ca. 1500 Verse". This project is proved by two early fragments, separately published and not taken up in the tragedy. They show how he moved away from his French source; the first one, "Der Kreuzweg im Lande Phokis", is still close to Péladan and his glorification of free will, the second one, "Die Königin Jokasta", is already in the spirit of his own innovations in the second act of Ödipus und die Sphinx.

⁹Prosa I (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1950), pp. 92-93.

The structure of Hofmannsthal's tragedy is close to that of Péladan. In the first act, Oedipus coming back from Delphi tells his servants from Corinth what the oracle has foretold him, sends them away and decides to live in solitude; Laius and his escort appear and out of self-defense he kills them and his father. In the second act, Hofmannsthal has introduced two new scenes, presenting Creon, Jocasta and Laius' mother, Antiope, and through them Theban politics and the situation in Oedipus' family. The third act is again closer to the French tragedy: Tiresias announces the liberation from the sphinx and the arrival of Oedipus at the palace and this leads on to an immediate irresistible attraction between him and his mother. The third act is changed in the sense that Oedipus is not so unambiguously triumphant as he had been in Péladan, but again the happy union with Jocasta at the end seems to bring a solution to all the suffering.

So much for the dramatic action, but it cannot at all convey an idea of the atmosphere and the emotional quality of the play, nor of its extreme interiorization leading to an impression of unreality suggesting a deeper meaning behind every gesture, every expression. This symbolic aspect is mainly due to the poetic elements of Hofmannsthal's language, and it would be wrong to reject the play as a mere bad taste application of psychoanalysis. To understand what Hofmannsthal's intentions were, the play has to be seen in the light of its author's general ideas.

In Ad me ipsum, an autobiographic study,¹⁰ indications can be found on the main problems he was facing in his writings, and which are also essential parts of Ödipus und die Sphinx. There is the basic idea of man's passage from what he calls Praeexistenz, to Existenz, the former being a state of complete self-sufficiency, of isolation, that has to be overcome, by a

¹⁰In Aufzeichnungen, op. cit., pp. 211-244.

"Zu-sich-selber kommen", by a "Verknüpfung mit dem Leben" that will lead to the realization of one's higher self.¹¹ This is precisely what Oedipus has to do, and his transformation is achieved through sacrifice and action, as he explains in his notes: "Der Weg zum Leben und zu den Menschen durchs Opfer: zwei Mythen: Alkestis und Ödipus. Das Opfer als Selbstaufgabe. (Diese liegt schon im Übergang vom einen zum andern Moment.)"¹² He considers both myths as illustrations of a metamorphosis through action which is a self-sacrifice, too. Linked to this are his ideas on the function of dreams and their realization through action, on the antinomy of being and becoming, and of passing time and duration. Another characteristic of his plays is the device of polarizing characters, like Oedipus and Creon, to stress their qualities and deficiencies. For the denouement of his plays he uses a different relation of characters, the so-called "allomatisches Element", where the union of two individuals leads to their mutual transformation, to their passage from Praeexistenz to Existenz, from solitude to an integration with life.

Such ideas may appear obscure in the context of the traditional Oedipus theme, but they give a clue to Hofmannsthal's tragedy, that cannot simply be judged by comparison with its classical precedents.

As the sphinx episode is a crucial point in contemporary Oedipus works, it is interesting to see how Hofmannsthal conceives her. There is no riddle, but her words of welcome sound far more horrifying to him: "Sei, Ödipus, gegrüsst, der du die tiefen Träume träumst!" (p. 156) Dreams indeed are a key word in the whole play. At the opening, Oedipus' servants from Corinth watch him arrive bewildered and pale as if he were sleepwalking. He him-

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 216-217.

¹² Ibid., p. 217.

self is aware of being in a dreamlike state when he tells Phönix:

Nun kannst du mich nicht wecken,
Denn nun träumt alles mit. Dass ihr mich alle
erkannt habt! Alle rief ihr meinen Namen ...
So hab' ich mein Gesicht von damals?

(p. 17)

What has happened that could have changed him so utterly? It is the terrible answer of the oracle in Delphi that he has just consulted. This is a traditional part of the myth, a short episode that Hofmannsthal has treated in a new approach revealing his own interpretation of the tragedy of destiny. He transforms the oracle into a kind of psychoanalytic session, it becomes the experience of the infinite of the soul:

Wo ...
die Seele dir, der eignen Kraft erschrocken,
hinuntertauchen in sich selber will
und spürt, hier ist kein Grund: dem Weltmeer ist
ein Grund gesetzt - ihr nicht

(pp. 29-30)

There falling from one dream into another he felt renewed, but he also felt, through his blood, united with his ancestors. And then the climax, the terrifying, most horrible nightmare seized him, his "lifedream":

... Ich träumte
den Lebenstraum. Wie ein gepeitschtes Wasser
jagte mein Leben in mir hin, - auf einmal
erschlugen meine Hände einen Mann:
und trunken war mein Herz von Lust des Zornes.
Ich wollte sein Gesicht sehn, doch ein Tuch
verhüllte das, und weiter riss mich schon
der Traum und riss mich in ein Bette, wo
ich lag bei einem Weib, in deren Armen
mir war, als wäre ich ein Gott ...

.....

... und dann
kams auf mich zu, gerade auf mein Lager,
und leise glitt ein schleppendes Gewand
am Boden hin - so wie die Mutter kam es,

wenn sie ans Bett des Kindes tritt, so wie
die Braut zum Bräutigam, so trugen leise
die Füße es heran.

(pp. 31-32)

Such an experience can never be entirely forgotten; its dramatic function for the tragedy is similar to that of the oracle that Laius had received in Sophocles and in the traditional version of the myth. Both events are happening outside the action of the drama and yet remain the permanent reference point for all further events. In Sophocles the two oracles given to Laius and to Oedipus lie a long time back, and as they have not become true in the meantime they are hardly remembered or are considered to be superstitious beliefs. In Hofmannsthal however, the detailed report of this modern "oracle", still very fresh in Oedipus' memory, makes it the obsessive and painful experience of a tortured soul. The significant change in approach to the old problem of destiny is the complete inversion of the situation. Before, man's free will was clashing with an obscure, external force; in Greek tragedy man was standing in opposition to the divine or natural laws, and through suffering and sacrifice the cosmic order had to be restored. But now destiny is transferred within man himself, as Oedipus can literally feel it:

So wird es geschehen, sprach der Gott, den Weg
zeigte er nicht.
Ich spür den Weg.
Durch mein Wesen hindurch bahnt sich's den Weg
wie durch fliessendes Wasser.

(p. 42)

How has man to cope with such a destiny, and can he overcome it? This is the problem that Hofmannsthal in his Ad me ipsum calls the way from Praeexistenz identified with Schicksallosigkeit to Existenz, to the realization of one's higher self that has to be achieved through self-sacrifice or action. Oedipus, by killing his father and agreeing to confront the sphinx, has chosen action,

and here the terrible irony appears: his actions cannot but be a fulfilment of his oracle-dream which was his first step into Existenz. Could action really save him, and has he any responsibility at all for this destiny?

Part of the complexity of the play is inherent in the traditional Oedipus theme, but to this are added the problems raised by psychoanalysis. At first it seems obvious that only his Viennese contemporary, Sigmund Freud, could have been his source. Freud had mentioned the famous Oedipus complex for the first time in 1897 when he wrote:

Ein einziger Gedanke von allgemeinem Wert ist mir aufgegangen. Ich habe die Verliebtheit in die Mutter und die Eifersucht gegen den Vater auch bei mir gefunden und halte sie jetzt für ein allgemeines Ereignis früher Kindheit ... Wenn das so ist, so versteht man die packende Macht des Königs Ödipus ... Die griechische Sage greift einen Zwang auf, den jeder anerkennt, weil er dessen Existenz in sich verspürt hat. Jeder der Hörer war einmal im Keime und in der Phantasie ein solcher Ödipus, und vor der hier in die Realität gezogenen Traumerfüllung schaudert jeder zurück mit dem ganzen Betrag der Verdrängung, der seinen infantilen Zustand von seinem heutigen trennt.¹³

This is not the place to discuss Freud's theories, but the literary reactions toward Oedipus Tyrannus show that in spite of psychoanalysis not all the writers have been attracted by this aspect of the myth alone. Even Ödipus und die Sphinx does not entirely depend on Freud, as Hofmannsthal has indirectly explained himself. About 1922 he remembers Freud as having been, some twenty years earlier, "ein interessanter und unauffälliger Privatmann", and he goes on to compare the poet's and the psychologist's attitude toward the famous complex:

¹³Letter to W. Fliess (1897) quoted from K. Kerényi, "Vorwort" Ödipus II, Theater der Jahrhunderte (München: Langen-Müller, 1968), p. 16.

... in ihm lebte eine Intuition, die ihm zu einem grossen Komplex der geheimsten und verschwiegensten Vorgänge - nicht nur im Individuum, sondern auch in der menschlichen Gemeinschaft - den Schlüssel gab, einen Schlüssel, den vor ihm niemand so bewusst in der Hand gehabt hatte - mit Ausnahme der Dichter. Den Dichtern aber, die sehr wohl und zu allen Zeiten diesen Schlüssel in Händen gehabt hatten, war es vom Gesetz der Natur aus nicht gegeben, ja es war ihnen geradezu verwehrt, von ihm einen anderen Gebrauch zu machen als einen priesterlichen, durchaus verschleierte[n], esoterischen.¹⁴

Hofmannsthal, the poet, did not need the scientific theories to understand the human soul, but he therefore is also expressing them in the poet's sacred and veiled language. On the other hand, for him Freud's discoveries were a natural result of the interest of contemporary Vienna in the subconsciousness. Thus his friend, A. Schnitzler, was a psychoanalyst and a playwright, while he also knew Breuer's study on hysteria written in collaboration with Freud.¹⁵

To come back to the play: the first act ends on the murder of Laius, and while Oedipus, excited and full of strength after the fight, gives up his plans for a retired life and puts his hope in action, voices are heard in the storm. They are his ancestors, but he cannot hear them. Their song is more than a choral comment, they give the true version of the events: overlooking past and present, they foreshadow the destiny of Oedipus who is part of their own blood.

In the second act Creon stands at the centre of the first scene: after the death of Laius a passionate opposition between

¹⁴"Zweiter Brief aus Wien", (Vienna Letters I-V, 1922-1924), in Aufzeichnungen, op. cit., p. 289.

¹⁵For a discussion of Freud's influence on Hofmannsthal, see W. Jens, Hofmannsthal und die Griechen (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1955), pp. 9-10.

him and Jocasta has begun. The development of Creon's character and function in the play is Hofmannsthal's creation. In the 1903 text of Péladan's tragedy he does not appear, while in the earlier version his role had been very minor. Corneille and Voltaire had left him out altogether. This is probably due to the ambiguity of his character through the presentation of the three Theban plays by Sophocles, and besides they found more interest in their sub-plot.¹⁶ If Hofmannsthal adds this character it is not for lack of interesting material but because of his technique of doubling his main characters by a similar, yet opposed figure, Oedipus by Creon, Jocasta by Antiope.

The one decisive moment in Creon's life was when, as a young boy, he had to report the Delphic oracle to Laius and Jocasta on their wedding-day. This is an example of Hofmannsthal's assimilation of Sophoclean elements: in the Oedipus Tyrannus, too, Creon reports the oracle from Delphi - but to Oedipus - , and both events lead to a quarrel. Then he knew that some day he would become king of Thebes, his destiny appeared clear to him as if it had been an oracle on his life.

dies Wissen: du bist König, bis dahin
bist du das ungeborne Schattenbild
von einem König! Mensch, von Stund' an waren
des Lebens Möglichkeiten abgelebt
im voraus. Welche Taten sollt ich tuen?

(p. 69)

When the future proves to be different from what he had imagined it to become, he is not able to overcome his dreams and transform them into action:

¹⁶ Dryden however has linked his two sub-plots of the lovers and of the villain Creon.

... Ich hab zuviel geträumt. Beschneide mir
 die Träume, Magier, mit einem Messer:
 denn nun ist Laios tot,
 nun müssen meine Kräfte schwellen
 zum Reißen, Mensch, nun muss ich greifen können
 nach Kron' und Schwert, die Träume muss ich abtun:
 ein König träumt nicht, eines Königs Träume
 gehen aus ihm hervor und werden Taten
 und thronen in der Welt ...

(p. 70)

But he is painfully aware that he is not a king. Action also means sacrifice, which he is completely incapable of. His insatiable soul takes possession of everything he can reach: he absorbs the whole world in himself but cannot establish any real contact with it, and so remains utterly lonely: "Das Weltall / stockt rings um ihn. Er glaubt an keinen Menschen. / Kein Weg zu ihm." (p. 91) These are the words of his boy servant who shares his dreams, but unable to endure any more this unbearable inaction and lack of communication with his much admired master, he kills himself. However disastrous the consequences of Oedipus' deeds will be, at least he is able to act and thus come out of the dangerous solitude of mere dreaming.

The next scene, also entirely of Hofmannsthal's invention, presents a confrontation between Jocasta and her very old mother-in-law, Antiope. More than anywhere else in the play, the atmosphere is dark and mysterious: a room with all black curtains on the walls for Laius' funeral, and the lamentation of the mourning women set the tone. Antiope, very hostile at the beginning, accuses Jocasta for her sterility, yet in herself, who is more dead than alive, no vital force is left. Already through the voices in the first act, and the oracle-dream, a link with the ancestors had been established. But though Oedipus is of their blood, they belong to another world, as Antiope knows herself:

"... uralte Götter nähren
 mein altes Blut, die Nacht und andere,
 zu denen ihr zu wenig betet ...

(p. 99)

When Jocasta tells her about the oracle and the (supposed) killing of her baby, Antiope will approve of such an act. This scene is more than than the passionate opposition of two generations, of mother and daughter-in-law:

Antiope: Recht war und klug und so, wie sich's geziemt
für einen König, war, was Laios tat.
Auch mit dem Schicksal ringt ein König noch
Brust gegen Brust.

Jokaste: Nein! nein! nein! Ihr - ihr wohl.
Ihr tut's! Mit fürchterlichen Händen greift
ihr in die Welt. Allein was frommt es denn?
Nützt denn das blut'ge Opfer?

(p. 108)

Here a clash between two cultures appears, Antiope's archaic view on blood sacrifice can no longer be accepted by Jocasta. Eventually however the two women will be reconciled, Antiope sympathizing with Jocasta's suffering. She then even consecrates her for a successor to Laius, but the younger queen is scared and feels it is for death.

For this scene and other aspects of his approach, Hofmannsthal was most probably influenced by Bachofen. He was familiar with his theories that are among the first to point out the significance of myth in its relation to history, and as an expression of various stages in the development of cultures. As for Freud, there is no need to stress too much a possible source for Hofmannsthal: but Bachofen's most famous book, Das Mutterrecht (1861), may explain the opposition of Creon and Jocasta, her consecration by Antiope standing for the victory of matrilineal kingship. Bachofen has a chapter on the Oedipus myth¹⁷ in which he distinguishes the

¹⁷ Cf. his chapter, "Sophokles' Vergleichung der Oedipus-töchter mit den ägyptischen Frauen. Betrachtung des Oedipusmythus und der drei in ihm sich aufbauenden Entwicklungsstufen, des tellurisch-hetärischen, des demetrischen und des apollinischen Lebensgesetzes. Bemerkungen des Mythos zur Geschichte." in J. J. Bachofen, Der Mythos von Orient und Occident (München: Beck, 1956), pp. 264-271.

characteristics of three cultural stages, corresponding but not entirely identical to Hofmannsthal's three generations of characters. The opposition between Jocasta and Antiope would be for Bachofen the passage from "hetaeric" matrimony which implies the possibility of unconscious parricide and incest, to an age of "Demetrian" connubial rights where the child's father is recognized. The second opposition will lead from the stage of Demeter to that of Apollo and the victory of patriarchy.

This final stage coinciding with the reconciliation of the Erinyes as Bachofen sees it in the Oidipodeia and the Oresteia can only take place in the Oedipus at Colonus, and for Hofmannsthal's prologue the maternal forces are still dominant as Jocasta feels it herself:

Doch die Mütter - zu der Mutter -
Die Mütter ziehen alles hinter sich,
Das Blut ist stark, die Welt hängt an den Müttern.

(p. 116)

The last part of the second act, which takes place in front of the palace, is again closer to Péladan and has echoes from the classical versions in the consultation of Tiresias. It is interesting to see how Hofmannsthal has achieved another pair of characters by comparing the magus Anagyrontidas and Tiresias, the seer. In Sophocles there had been a distinction between the high priest and the prophet, while Seneca had only Tiresias. Here it is Creon who consults the magus whose practices add an oriental as well as a Senecan element to the play:

... Auf dem Leib
des Opfertieres lag ich, zuckend mit
dem Zuckenden. Aus seiner Kehle troff
das Blut. Ich mischte meinen Hauch damit,
da fuhr die Seele mir aus meinem Leib
und schwang sich auf dem Tier hinab zur Herrin Hekate.

(pp. 64-65)

Tiresias, on the other hand is asked by Antiope to reveal the murderer of Laius, while the Theban people want to know who will be their saviour.

Strong dramatic irony underlies a short incident. Tiresias kneels at Jocasta's feet which for the surrounding crowd is a symbol of her divine nature, that Antiope, too, has recognized. Yet when Tiresias says it is she who consecrates him, Nietzsche's interpretation of the old Persian belief that wise men are born of incest should be remembered. Jocasta and Oedipus will appear powerful and godlike at the end of the play, but at what price, only the Oedipus Tyrannus will reveal.

Tiresias had announced the liberator's entrance in the city; he arrives and the mutual attraction of Jocasta and Oedipus is immediate. It transforms him into a Herculean hero ready for the contest with the sphinx, and sure that now he has definitely avoided the accomplishment of the Delphic oracle. Antiope is reported to have died, and Jocasta faints when he leaves.

In the third act, dominated by the pseudo-victory over the sphinx, the situation is extremely complex and ambiguous. Every action, almost every statement, points to a further development. Apparently, from the present standpoint of the characters involved in the action, the end is a solution to all the conflicts: liberation from the sphinx and reconciliation of Creon with the happy lovers and for Thebes, a new king.

Three stages can be distinguished in Oedipus' situation evolving from his triumphant march against the sphinx to deepest dejection, and back to a godlike consecration at the end. The constant opposition of Oedipus and Creon is characterized by a subtle underlying irony. Creon, coming as a guide with Oedipus to the rock of the sphinx is jealously aware of his companion's tremendous energy, the failure of which he will not understand, but on the contrary when Oedipus is all depressed, he will adore him as

a god. Oedipus starts off filled with the strength of a Nietzschean Übermensch, he feels like being master over life and death and generously kills a dying man, victim of the sphinx, at his request.

The climax of the play is the meeting with the sphinx, it becomes at once a recognition and a reversal. A recognition indeed when the sphinx greets him:

Es nannte mich beim Namen! "Ödipus,
sprach es zu mir! sei, Ödipus, gegrüsst,
der du die tiefen Träume träumst!" Gekannt!
Auch hier gekannt! Die Welt hat keine Schlucht,
die nicht voll meiner Flüche ist ...

(p. 156)

The Delphic dream-oracle cannot be forgotten, Oedipus remains always the same in spite of his apparently new life through action. He is reminded that he is not the hero he tried to become, the Lebenstraum is eventually just as much a denial of free will as Creon's dreaming is. The only acts that Oedipus can accomplish are those obscurely foreseen at Delphi: the killing of his father and the marriage with his mother. The one important deed, not foretold and not instinctive reaction as the two others were, the victory over the sphinx that he was so determined to win, turned out a failure: "Ich hab meine Tat nicht tun können:/ Das Wesen floh vor mir!" This was the only thing that Péladan's Oedipus had dreaded, but it did not happen and he did (or seemed to) solve all her riddles, while here the contest does not even start. All action, all attempt to change seems to be illusion, and Hofmannsthal's play, too is in this sense a tragedy of destiny. This is the meaning of the sphinx' message, a second oracle: you cannot escape your "life-dream". Like the Sophoclean hero after the anagnorisis sees for a short while only death as a liberation, Oedipus here, too, wants to die. But the fight with Creon who, in the lightning that sets the old tree aflame, recognizes a symbol for his divine nature, and especially the arrival of Jocasta, makes

him forget his one moment of lucidity. The happy ending, Jocasta and Oedipus saving each other from their death wish and the city from the plague, is only half truth, or a partial dénouement. It is the characteristic solution of the first (or second) part of the Aeschylean trilogy; in the next part it has to be transformed into a new conflict, and only in the last play a final reconciliation can be achieved.

Ödipus und die Sphinx thus has to be seen in relation with the sequence in the myth, as it appeared in Sophocles' plays. Whether Hofmannsthal intended significant changes in his Ödipus-Greis is difficult to say as his play is not available.¹⁸ In the translation of the Oedipus Tyrannus he does not change the plot, but a few points on this König Ödipus are revealing for his approach to the Greek tragedy. In his 1911 edition he adds to the title, "Übersetzt und für die neuere Bühne eingerichtet".¹⁹ The new stage is no longer a Greek amphitheatre, and so he changes the background to a dark indoor setting; the choral songs are split into conversations between the old men.²⁰ As a translation it is not a satisfactory work, there are omissions as well as additions, modernized phrases, all pathos and all echoes from classical rhetoric are avoided. But Hofmannsthal's aim was not to approximate Sophocles as closely as possible. For him the permanent value has to be discovered anew by each generation:

¹⁸ Perhaps it was never written, cf. W. Jens, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁹ Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag.

²⁰ This technique was used in other stage translations for which the chorus was always one of the major problems; cf. W. Schadewaldt, op. cit. p. 552-556.

Betrachtet man die Wielandsche Auffassung der Antike und die Nietzscheschenebeneinander, ebenso die von Winkelmann und von Jacob Burckhardt, so erkennt man, dass wir noch mehr als die andern Nationen die Antike als einen magischen Spiegel behandeln, aus dem wir unsere eigene Gestalt in fremder, gereinigter Erscheinung zu empfangen hoffen.²¹

²¹"Das Buch der Freunde", Aufzeichnungen, op. cit., p. 43.

RUDOLF PANNWITZ
DIE BEFREIUNG DES OIDIPUS (1913)
AND
THEBAIS (1965)

Rudolf Pannwitz (1881-1969) included in his Dionysische Tragödien, published in 1913,¹ an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, entitled Die Befreiung des Oidipus: Ein dionysisches Spiel. (The four other tragedies are Der Tod des Empedokles, Philoctetes, Der glückliche König Kroisos, Iphigenie mit dem Gotte.) If it is not possible to see a direct influence of Hofmannsthal's Ödipus und die Sphinx, it is nevertheless revealing that both authors were closely linked, though their direct relationship started only in 1917, when Pannwitz sent him a copy of his Krisis der europäischen Kultur. Hofmannsthal became a great admirer of this inheritor of Nietzsche's ideas who was at the same time a poet, a philosopher, a teacher, a defender of European culture, and a politician.² They shared the awareness of the chaotic situation of the contemporary world and the will to change it by what Hofmannsthal had called a "conservative revolution". Pannwitz' knowledge of Indian and Chinese philosophy and literature also appealed to Hofmannsthal's interest in the Orient.

To understand the approach of Pannwitz to the Oedipus at Colonus a few of his basic attitudes have to be considered: his views on history and the past, his debt to Nietzsche, and the literary affinities with his time. In spite of the huge amount of his publications - more than sixty major works - and their division into poetic or literary, and theoretical writings, the apparent

¹Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1913; page references to this edition are given in the text.

²Prosa IV, p. 413.

variety is linked by his central ideas on culture and civilization. Both Péladan and Hofmannsthal had used and transformed the classical sources for their own purposes. According to Pannwitz' conception of history as an increasing number of layers, the existing world can never ignore the underlying layers of the past. "Keine Epoche der Geschichte ist nur eben diese. Sie enthält als Erbe und als Stufung die ihr vorhergegangenen mit, ist aus ihnen allen aufgebaut."³

It is significant that a man whose entire effort was directed toward the creation of a new type of man for the future, was nevertheless so strongly aware of the importance of the past. Under the influence of Heraclitus his view of history was cyclical, and he believed in the return of earlier ages in slightly different forms. Then it is not surprising that the ancient Greek (as well as Oriental) myths could have a specific significance for our time. In the approach of later ages to cultures of the past, he distinguishes two different types that can however not always be clearly separated: Renaissance is rebirth in the same country, Humanism, on the other hand, is the adoption of a past culture by a foreign people in a foreign country. He is also aware that a revival of ancient masterpieces through new adaptations does not necessarily mean "classicism", an important distinction for modern reinterpretations of old themes.

Beides (Renaissance und Humanismus), unromantisch, ja gegenromantisch der Gesinnung nach, hat Anteil am Romantischen: eine Abkehr von der Gegenwart und ein Füssen im Vergangenen. Beides hat das gleiche Ideal: das Klassische. Was wir Renaissance nennen dürfen, kommt den Mustern näher und ist echter und stärker, da es sich von der Nachahmung befreit und eigenwüchsig entfaltet. Der Humanismus dagegen bleibt mehr oder minder unsicher und befangen, und wo er das durchbricht, wird er Renaissance sui generis.⁴

³Gilgamesch-Sokrates (Stuttgart: E. Klett Verlag, 1966)

p. 4.

⁴ibid., p. 9.

This shows the complexity of the phenomenon of new plays on ancient themes: Renaissance, in so far as it revived the classical tradition, had never entirely disappeared, and yet an identification with ancient Greece is not possible. Only by a close understanding of the models can a slavish imitation be avoided for a new, yet genuine recreation. The present is always the most important aspect; by transforming the past it is also transformed itself, and thus together they determine the future. But this metamorphosis depends on the perspective through which the past is seen:

Die Perspektivierung hat grenzenlose Möglichkeiten infolge der Unerschöpflichkeit des Perspektivierenden und des Perspektivierten, besonders ihrer Anziehungen und Abstossungen, Verträglichkeiten und Unverträglichkeiten, die sie gegeneinander ausüben und voneinander erleiden. So aber, und nicht allein auf unmittelbarer und rein naturhafter Bahn, bricht alles fernst Vergangene, das zu unserer Kenntnis gelangt ist oder eben gelangt, in unsere Gegenwart ein und bestimmt, nach seiner Inkubation, die einen Tag oder auch Jahrhunderte dauern kann, in Verschmelzungen vom niedrigsten bis zum höchsten Grade unsere Zukunft.⁵

Thus the perspective that Pannwitz will take is firmly based on Nietzsche, and yet will not be the same as those of Péladan and Hofmannsthal. Pannwitz is no blind imitator, on the whole his attitude is less aggressive and more reconciling than Nietzsche's. His attempt is to continue his work and lead it to its ultimate goal which he summarizes in his study, Nietzsche und die Verwandlung des Menschen.⁶

This is not the place for a comparison of both men's ideas, but two main Nietzschean concepts are important for the understanding of the Oedipus plays. The creation of a new life is

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶ Akademische Verlagsanstalt Pantheon, n.d. (written in 1939).

an idea that appears already in the dedication of the Dionysische Tragödien:

Friedrich Nietzsche dem Schöpfer
unseres neuen Lebens
die Ausgabe dieser Werke
als einer ganzen Jugend
verspätete Antwort und
Dankbarkeit für die Tat.

At the centre of this new life stands man, a new kind of man who does not find his fulfilment in an afterlife, but in and through the cosmos.⁷

The sub-title, "Ein dionysisches Spiel", indicates the second Nietzschean influence: its Dionysian character, which right from the beginning marks a striking difference from Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. The play indeed opens with the singing and dancing of the chorus while a Dionysian celebration is finishing behind the stage - a scene that lasts until the arrival of Oedipus and Antigone. Throughout the play the importance of the chorus is such that, rather than Oedipus himself, it seems to be the central character. This structure is founded on a close application of Nietzsche's concept of the chorus in his Geburt der Tragödie.⁸ Opposing Apollinian and Dionysian aspects of art, Nietzsche distinguishes sculpture, painting and epic poetry as the static works that the artist watches as an image (Bild) outside himself, from the Dionysian dramatic chorus which is a lively playing ("ein lebendiges Spiel") where every participant feels himself magically transformed into a servant of his master Dionysus. Originally there was only the chorus out of which the dramatic action of tragedy developed:

⁷Cf. Nietzsche und die Verwandlung des Menschen, passim.

⁸Passim. mainly p. 49 ff.

Die Verzauberung ist die Voraussetzung aller dramatischen Kunst. In dieser Verzauberung sieht sich der dionysische Schwärmer als Satyr und als Satyr wiederum schaut er den Gott, d.h. er sieht in seiner Verwandlung eine neue Vision ausser sich, als apollinische Vollendung seines Zustandes. Mit dieser neuen Vision ist das Drama vollständig.⁹

This is exactly what happens in the play of Pannwitz: the chorus alone is "real", the action itself, the Oedipus story, is only its vision resulting from their transformation into satyrs and servants of Dionysus.

For Nietzsche there is no doubt that not only the earliest Greek tragedies were dealing with the sufferings of Dionysus, but that until Euripides the tragic hero, like Prometheus or Oedipus, was always a mask of the suffering God.¹⁰ The chorus, who suffers and is at the end glorified with him (or his personification), does not act, but in spite of its wild, fantastic outlook, it is endowed with wisdom and a prophetic knowledge.

Pannwitz, in the stage indication, describes his chorus, "in fantastischen gewändern und masken / mit sehr raschen in einander fallenden gesängen".¹¹ They do not form a homogenous group but pass over and behind the stage, dancing and running in small groups. Their songs have a dreamlike quality, obscure and ecstatic, expressing mainly sensations. Rather than a coherent meaning, a few key words characteristic of their trance can be distinguished: the Dionysian dream and intoxication (Traum und

⁹Die Geburt der Tragödie, p. 52.

¹⁰ibid., p. 61.

¹¹Contrary to the usual German spelling Pannwitz uses minuscules only.

Rausch), dance and music, nymphs and sleep . . . , Dionysus himself is mentioned as the verwandel-wunder-gott (p. 206). In these very loosely connected songs some prophetic visions appear: death in the God as a liberation from suffering, and destiny foreshadows the death of Dionysus-Oedipus; without mentioning the name of Oedipus they sing the story of his guiltless crimes; and in the middle of the frenzied dancing the union of Dionysus and Apollo is recalled - the very essence of Attic tragedy according to the Geburt der Tragödie.

If Nietzsche is responsible for the interpretation of the Oedipus at Colonus, Pannwitz' language and style are characteristic of the literary tendencies of his time. About 1910 Impressionism was gradually succeeded by the new movement of Expressionism, and Pannwitz has achieved a blend of both in his play. He was a follower of Stefan George who insisted above all on the formal aspects. The sacred aspect of poetry is expressed by an obscure language, and its aristocratic limitation to small circles by a new spelling and a peculiar punctuation; the stress is on impression rather than on narration, and theatrical works are limited to lyric drama. All this can be found in Pannwitz' play where the combination of colour, light and movement creates a Dionysian atmosphere:

(Einzelne kommen rhythmisch schreitend auch.
tanzend auf die bühne)
Die fichten verblüht die tänze vertönt noch alles
voll blut
Oioie Iakche alai iu!
Irrfahrende winde verwehende schwärme an ortlosen ort
Oioie Iakche alai iu!
Die tale die berge braunrotes gezottel getaumelt in traum
Oioie Iakche alai iu!
Du lenkst uns mit rotzapf und wein du mit müder musik
und geras
Oioie Iakche alai iu!

(p. 202)

But the frenzied dancing, the importance of gestures, the abrupt, sudden movements, the anonymous groups within the chorus where no individual characters can be distinguished - these are aspects of Expressionist drama.

For Nietzsche the function of the introductory choral songs and dance is to give the spectator a Dionysian excitement and prepare him for the arrival of the hero who then will appear to him as a visionary godlike figure. For the action itself Pannwitz stays close to Sophocles' play though it is a shortened version. The interesting changes are in the characters' attitudes toward Oedipus and his former crimes. When the chorus, horrified by Oedipus' identity, wants to drive him away, Antigone takes up his defence, not so much by discussing the problem of his guilt as by drawing attention to the nature of man:

Von göttern fabelnd / wisst ihr nicht das:
In ober-händen wir alle sind
(Nicht ein vöglein entfleucht)
Um uns schwer wolket unsündge sünd /
Doch erkennet menschen der mensch!

(p. 220)

This last line is the central idea of Pannwitz' thought. The divine character of Oedipus was clearly part of the Oedipus at Colonus stressed by his mysterious death and promise of protection to the city of Athens. Pannwitz insists on calling him the most divine of men but not a god, like in the Oedipus Tyrannus, where the suppliant priest in the opening scene makes the same distinction. As Theseus understands he is the new type of man related to the new god Dionysus:

Viel anders als einen gott habe ich dich nie geachtet.
oh und seit wir den grossen herrlichen heiligen Dionysos geschaut haben und in seine gewalt gekommen sind -: was unterscheidet noch gott und mensch?

(p. 224)

Theseus himself will become immortal after an "immeasurable life". Pannwitz had developed this idea in his theoretical writings. By the relation to Dionysus Oedipus becomes a Nietzschean Übermensch: this liberation of man from destiny and death, as the title indicates, can only be achieved with his help.¹²

The key passage of the play announcing the coming of a new age takes place in the confrontation of Theseus and Creon who cannot understand the principles of Athenian justice. Sophocles concludes his play with the praise of Athens and its new laws; for Nietzsche, too, the old ethics could not judge Oedipus' case and a new superior order is foreshadowed (p. 56). In Die Befreiung des Oidipus Theseus explains to Creon what this future age will be :

Ich will es dir deuten / könig Kreon. es beginnt ein
neues alter / das goldene wieder nach dem eisernen.
heilige sagen haben alles verhiessen. die musik wird
mächtiger werden denn das wort. aus tänzen werden
die erkenntnisse herrlicher neu erstehen. die stimme
der herzen wird eher gehört werden als die stimme
der könige. und am bezwingensten tönen werden
diese drei stimmen: des sehers / des sängers und
des weibes.

(p. 233)

Already in the play these three new voices can be recognized: Antigone's in whose words the chorus had heard an Apollinian-Dionysian power; the voice of the chorus, and of Oedipus who leaves this life as a seer (p. 244).

¹²Cf. "Dionysos ist der Befreier und Erlöser zum sich selber tragenden Leben. Durch ihn ist das Leben „Selbstsinn und Selbstziel ... Der Gott Dionysos ist Bruder des Übermenschen. Dieser ist von ihm nicht sehr verschieden. Er hat die selbe Art, nur nicht die Idealität des Gottes." Nietzsche und die Verwandlung des Menschen, p. 50.

The most significant change in meaning occurs in the meeting of Oedipus and Polyneices. The son, guilt-ridden for having expelled his father, the innocent-guilty, is haunted by the injustice of laws and of destiny. He recognizes the greatness as well as the failure of his father's mission which was to put man in the place of the hazy gods: "Ah du! dich hat es gekostet! dich der geboren war / das heilige an die stelle des göttlichen zu setzen / wiederherzustellen die alten kräfte des Prometheus!" (p. 238). Oedipus' attitude toward Polyneices is a complete inversion from the wrath of the Sophoclean hero, he is resigned, admitting to his son that the absurd is inscrutable. But without contradicting this absurd destiny of man, according to which Polyneices and Eteocles have to die at each other's hand, he changes the curse into a compassionate wish: for his son this death should become a happy awakening from his present frenzied dream!

All through the play this unreal, visionary nature of the action is recalled best in the remark by Oedipus and Antigone:

Antigone: Lieber vater! bist du auch ganz wach?

Oedipus : Wie sollt ich? spürest du nicht ebenso /
dass wir alle geträumt werden?

Antigone: Von diesen festlichen chören vielleicht /
vielleicht von den göttern.

(p. 228)

Oedipus' end will be an awakening into death which alone can free him. The chorus prays to both Apollo and Dionysus, and Pannwitz said of his tragedies that they were creating an "apollinischen kosmos . . . unter dionysischen revolutionen hervorgebracht."¹³

¹³M. Dietrich, Das moderne Drama (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1962), p. 482.

Here the original function of Dionysus as god of the dead and leader of the souls is illustrated.¹⁴ But the Apollinian influence of Oedipus' death on the chorus is short, and after this moment of harmony and calm, it takes up again, according to Pannwitz' cyclic views of the universe, its frenetic singing and wild dancing on which the play ends.

THEBAIS

How much affinity Pannwitz has had for the myth of Oedipus and more generally for the Theban race, is best shown by his recent treatment of the story in an entirely new approach. In 1965, some fifty years after Die Befreiung des Oidipus, he published Thebais,¹⁵ a prose work, which is divided into two distinct parts: Kadmos¹⁶ and Teiresias. He explains himself that for sixty years he has shaped the myths as a poet and as a man of his time: "(ich habe) von einem neuen menschen her den alten und ältesten angeschaut und aufgebaut" (p. 54). It is more than keeping alive a tradition, he cannot but change it through the influence of recent historical, ethnologic, religious and psychological studies on his outlook. Because he does not write a play this time, nor a heroic epic poem, there is no need to look for dramatic effect or lyric decoration. He calls his work dichtung and rein-episch. It has become a personal poetic approach to the history of mythological figures when he addresses himself to Kadmos: "Kann ein spätgeborener dich noch antreffen? irgendwo

¹⁴Cf. Gilgamesch ..., p. 219.

¹⁵R. Pannwitz and O. Kokoschka, Thebais - Hellas (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1965); page references to this edition are given in the text.

¹⁶Separately published (Olten, 1960).

im raume oder in der zeit?" (p. 5). Through his work he wants to communicate with his heroes, to resurrect them as living people who should become significant figures for our time. He considers his motivations for writing to be the same as those of the Greek tragedians: "Sorge um die zukunft hat wie an den griechischen tragödien an dieser dichtung mitgewirkt. aber damals ging es noch nicht um das los der menschen selbst" (p. 55). Attic tragedy presented the conflicts between the gods and men, while Pannwitz' basic concern is man. Kadmos is an Übermensch; he sees in Kadmos the first man, in the sense of truly human, not unlike what Polyneices admired in his father. Still linked to earth by his origin, for he had come out of earth, Kadmos was chosen by the gods to introduce culture to Greece: this mission he fulfilled with his human forces alone, by founding the city of Thebes, and by establishing law, order and peace among the shepherds and hunters who up to then had always been quarreling. It is impossible to point out here all the underlying meanings of the development of human culture and religion that are concentrated in Kadmos.

The second part, Teiresias, which tells the story of Kadmos' descendents is more closely linked to Oedipus. The views on the misfortunes of Laius, Oedipus, and his sons are all presented through the eyes of Tiresias. This new approach casts a different light on the events, he is the seer, the shaman as Pannwitz calls him, a messenger of Zeus, yet a human being himself. His unique power consisted in seeing what is (p. 60), but he does not understand more than the simple cause-effect relations of life and nature (p. 123). He can warn Laius to send Chrysippus back, not to beget a child, or not to go to Delphi when he is bound to be killed by Oedipus. But Fate is stronger than he is and the gods from whom he has received his power. Laius does not listen, not more than Oedipus will when he triumphantly re-

turns from his victory over the sphinx. The following years are a constant dilemma for Tiresias: should he reveal the truth? Oedipus, though irascible, is a just king, and so he decides to keep the secret to himself - until one night terrible nightmares wake him up and serpent-haired Erinyes are hunting down the streets. Then he has to reveal everything to Oedipus and the people.

The traditional inquiry and recognition by Oedipus himself have entirely disappeared from this version, it is all Tiresias' doing. After Oedipus' blinding and Jocasta's suicide it is him that Polyneices and Eteocles will offend, and he (as well as Oedipus) curses them. The remaining events follow the classical pattern. There is nothing of the Dionysiac suffering and purification of the author's earlier tragedy, the events of which are summed up in a short passage:

die Erinyes war gerufen worden! sie hatte den fluch
des Oidipus gehört. ihn der jetzt als vertriebener
bettler umirrte / von seinen frommen töchtern
geleitet / ihn zwar verfolgte keine rächerin mehr:
die gnadenreichen erwarteten den heros. die söhne
aber hätten ohnedies fallen müssen / letzte der
schuldvollen Labdakiden. die Moira hat es ersonnen
die rächerinnen haben es vollendet.

(p. 75)

When afterwards Tiresias pleads for Antigone, Creon will not listen to him. Later he goes to the mountains, and after a meeting with Chiron, the centaur, he will disappear but nobody knows where he is buried.

The interesting role of Tiresias is to see the destiny of the whole family and not just the tragedy of the individual character. He, just as Kadmos for the first part, establishes the unity of the work and the links between the characters who are not so much related by one common divine curse on their race as

by their human foolishness and domination by Moira. But the work is not an epic in the sense that there are no heroes, even Teiresias is no hero, he cannot work miracles or change either the blindness of many or the decrees of Fate.

The most original addition to the myth follows in the second part of Teiresias, where he is called Der Rücktäter, literally he who acts back. Situated in the underworld, it is a kind of Nekuia, but it is more than a simple remembering. It is a poetic attempt to explain as far as it is possible the share of human responsibility and the power of Fate. This is how Persephone presents his task to Tiresias:

"bei uns wohnt die Moira nach deren bildern Zeus seine allmächtigen pläne richtet. sie hat jetzt unwirsch ihren webstuhl auf eine frist verlassen. Kehrt sie zurück so ist zu erwarten dass sie das fertige zerstört und neu beginnt. dem handele du entgegen. sie wird sich verwundern und zufrieden sein. du sollst /während sie rastet und vergisst / ohne es zu berühren das gewobene zurückweben bis nichts mehr da ist und alles wieder da ist aber von dir o mensch gewandelt."

(p. 84)

Tiresias is then having a sequence of interviews with each of the Theban heroes and discusses their life with them all over again. It is a kind of Socratic dialogue, Tiresias clarifies some facts discovering human weaknesses, but, as Persephone had insisted on, his view will be that of a human being and not all the problems can be solved. He is transforming the events into necessary (notwendige) events, but by no means unconditional ones (unbedingte) (cf. 123-124).

When the transfigured Oedipus arrives he admits himself that he is guilty in some things, but not in others. Through the discussion with Tiresias it appears that his anger and his hastiness help to explain some of his acts, but of course it is also

true that the Delphic oracle could have answered him more explicitly. Tiresias draws his attention to one quality that he was most lacking: Nichtwissen (p. 97), the awareness of not knowing everything. It was a kind of hybris that made Oedipus believe he had really solved the riddle of the sphinx. He had guessed the right word yet without understanding its meaning for himself. After his victory Tiresias had immediately noticed this: "nur dass jenes rätsel den menschen meint hat er eingesehen - dass er ein mensch ist nicht. der weise! der narr!" (p. 73). To understand what it means to be a man, this, Apollo had told Tiresias, was the secret of all his prophecies (p. 61). Oedipus should have been aware of his limitations, before acting he should have stopped to doubt and to hesitate.

Unlike the early Dionysian tragedy, Pannwitz here ends his Oedipus interpretation on Socratic wisdom, and this revision by Tiresias is the final version of the Theban history by which all earlier interpretations have been annihilated! (p. 85). In Gilgamesch - Sokrates a theoretical work written simultaneously, he sums up his ideas on Western and Oriental cultures and shows his way to the realization of man himself; here this distinction between knowledge and wisdom is more explicitly stated. Socrates' "I know that I do not know" is the fulfilment of the Delphic "know thyself":

Das bedeutet freilich nicht, wie der Moderne unterschieden möchte: erkenne dein Inneres, dich als Person. Es bedeutet ein Einziges: erkenne dass du ein Mensch bist - und hier vor den Gott trittst. Genau das sagt die Sfinx vor Theben mit ihrem Rätsel: dessen Auflösung abermals der Mensch ist. Ist das begriffen, so hat sie keinen
weiteren Auftrag, die Taten des Wahns zu rächen. ¹⁷

¹⁷ Gilgamesch - Sokrates, p. 100.

After the interview with Tiresias Oedipus has finally understood the riddle of the sphinx and of man, as far as a human being is able to grasp it. The greatness and "holiness" that Theseus and Polyneices had recognized in him is reaffirmed, he leaves Tiresias, "immer grösser werdend langsam aufwärts in die ferne" (p. 100).

This conclusion shows how independently Pannwitz has further developed the ideas of Nietzsche for whom Socrates marked the end of the unique union of Apollinian and Dionysian forces in Attic tragedy. To this aesthetic antithesis Pannwitz has preferred two characters symbolizing cultural extremes: Gilgamesch the Titan, and Socrates the Humanist.

However much personal thought Pannwitz has put into the myth and integrated it into his philosophy, his early Oedipus play nevertheless remains more an experiment than a great dramatic work, an application of Nietzschean ideas in a poetic style where the obscurity and strangeness leave little room for any communication with the reader, and a stage performance seems completely impossible. There is no doubt that of the three early twentieth century Oedipus treatments Hofmannsthal's tragedy is by far the greatest for its poetic qualities as well as for its underlying thought. Yet it can be said that all show Dionysian influences in form and spirit, along with a stress on psychological analysis in the two first ones. The introduction of the sphinx may express a tendency toward originality as reaction against naturalism, but its importance for the Oedipus theme is to illustrate the underlying conflict between mysterious superhuman forces and man. The development of this aspect of the tragedy, the relation of truth and appearance, of dream and reality, (or in a related sense of knowledge and wisdom in the Oedipus at Colonus) is, in spite of its formal originality, close to the Sophoclean tragedies. There the climax was the anagnorisis, the recognition of truth. In the recent interpretations it is no longer its dramatic quality as seen by

Aristotle that is stressed, but the problem in itself, leading to a development and interrelation of several elements of the myth: the Delphic oracle and Apollo's exhortation, "know thyself", are linked to the mysterious power of the sphinx whose riddle becomes another oracle. And it is this enigma and the many possible meanings given to it by the modern interpreters that help to see how they approached the play.¹⁸

¹⁸Four other Oedipus works have been written in the first quarter of this century: unfortunately no texts were available to me. Gertrud Prellwitz gave her Oedipus the sub-title, Das Rätsel des Lebens, Tragödie in 5 Akten (Freiburg i.B.: F.E. Fehsenfeld, 1898); her reinterpretation consists in eliminating all oracles, and Oedipus, marrying Jocasta, is aware of having killed her former husband (cf. Roman de Thèbes, see above p. 22). Hermann Schlag wrote an Oedipus trilogy (Weimar, 1903) and the myth also became the theme for a novel by Willy Speyer, Oedipus (Berlin: Cassirer, 1907), while in another work the Greek hero is associated with Christian figures: Christoph Schrempf, Menschenlos, Hiob, Jesus, Homo sum ... (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1921); cf. Karl Heinemann, Die tragischen Gestalten der Griechen in der Weltliteratur, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1920), and R.B. Matzig Odysseus. Studie zu antiken Stoffen in moderner Literatur besonders im Drama (Sankt Gallen: Pflugverlag, 1949).

SAINT-GEORGES DE BOUHELIER : OEDIPE, ROI DE THEBES,
JEAN COCTEAU : OEDIPE-ROI,

and an

Introduction to Contemporary French Oedipus plays.

At the beginning of the century the German speaking world seemed most propitious to reinterpretations of the old myth because of new attitudes toward Greek tragedy and recent discoveries in psychology, especially by Freud. But these theories soon spread over the rest of the world, and this explains to some extent the attraction that the Oedipus myth has had on our century. Many writers however, would not blindly adopt these theories, but rather recognized in them affinities with their own ideas which they were thus encouraged to develop in their works. More than any other period of this century the years between the two World Wars (until the end of the second War) were rich in new Oedipus plays, all of them coming from France, as part of a general trend toward adaptation of ancient themes in French drama. This is a well known movement, and the famous Oedipus plays by André Gide and Jean Cocteau (La Machine infernale) are two of its best examples. It is not often remembered that even in the 20th century they are not the only reinterpretations of this myth. This is why it seemed important to stress the early examples, remembering, on the other hand, that about the same time, several more Oedipus plays were written: Oedipe, Roi de Thèbes, by Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux, by Henri Ghéon, Ce vieil Oedipe, by Alexis Curvers, beside Cocteau's short version, Oedipe-roi, and Gide's conclusion of his play in Thésée. Though these are generally less important works they provide a variety of different approaches which allow us to see the possibilities of reinterpretations of this myth as an exam-

ple of the attitudes toward ancient themes in this century. Thus instead of repeating the points made in many former studies on the better known works, it may be just as rewarding to see all of them as one phenomenon of a literary tradition, with common and unique characteristics, even though less than full justice can be given to each of them.

The rigidity of the plot in Sophocles' tragedy accounts for the difficulties of giving a significant reinterpretation. This seems only possible by referring to earlier moments of Oedipus' life when the oracle was not yet fulfilled and actual decisions still seemed possible, either by presenting these events in the play (Hofmannsthal, Péladan, and Cocteau), or by constant flashbacks that put past and present in a new light (Gide, Ghéon).¹

A second method of adaptation, rather than reinterpretation, is not so much interested in creating new conflicts and problems as in reviving the old masterpiece, sometimes by developing certain aspects. Here the first concern is stage presentation to a contemporary audience; the two contradictory examples are Saint-Georges de Bouhélier's expanded version, and Cocteau's concentrated first Oedipus play.

SAINT-GEORGES DE BOUHELIER : OEDIPE, ROI DE THEBES

After the death of Mounet-Sully it was not thought possible to continue the performances of Oedipe-roi at the Comédie

¹K. Hamburger who defines the re-creations of Greek dramatic figures as "Konstanz des Stoffes und damit der Situation, Variabilität des Sichverhaltens der Personen", considers the rigidity and exemplary dramatic technique of the Oedipus Tyrannus as an obstacle to reinterpretations. Indeed the situation as it is presented does not allow a very different development, but the premises on which this action is based, as well as to a certain extent Oedipus' attitudes, can be changed; cf. K. Hamburger, Von Sophokles zu Sartre, Griechische Dramenfiguren antik und modern (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1962), pp. 15, 175-178.

Française. If for almost thirty-five years it had proved to be a great success of a classical repertoire, the spirit of its next staging, in a new version, was quite different. It is Oedipe, Roi de Thèbes, by Saint-Georges de Bouhélier,² first staged by Firmin Gémier, at the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, in 1919. In a long introduction the author professes his affinity to realist drama (paradoxically in very abstract and idealistic terms). Aware of the role that art plays in the life of a nation, he wants to help his people recover after the disasters of the war by restoring the dramatic masterpieces of the past, and presenting them in a new form, but this time, unlike the French classics, to all the people, and not to a restricted audience only. He wants to appeal to the crowds, as the Greek tragedians had, and the theatre should become a religious gathering (like in Orange). If such a drama is addressed to all classes of the people, the action on stage, too, should reflect this truly democratic spirit and show all aspects of life, as it did in his models, the medieval mystery and miracle plays, and in Shakespeare.

In his Oedipe ... his main attempt is thus to present the life of the royal family, and to stress its universally human problems, so that the spectator can identify himself with the heroes. According to this approach the play opens on the death of Polybus, Oedipus' foster father in Corinth, a very long and dull scene, exhibiting the splendor of the court with a sentimentality hardly reconcilable with the true tragedy of Oedipus himself. As it does not contribute to a change in the dramatic action, this addition to Sophocles does not seem justifiable. But one of Bouhélier's principles is to move the audience, not by stressing the extraordinary character of his hero's destiny, but by presenting it as a tragedy that could happen to any man. It comes close to the naturalist

²Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1919

"slice of life", the thirteen tableaux (i.e. 228 pages !!) should give a complete image of the situation at Thebes, and the relation between the king and his people. By presenting the love of Aymon and Antigone (recalling the sub-plots of the traditional adaptations), and the military games of Eteocles and Polynices, he develops themes inherent in the myth, but through them creates a background of ordinary family life. Yet instead of contributing to the dramatic progress, this carefully established context distracts the attention from the true tragedy here largely reduced to its emotional effect.

A significant aspect of Saint-Georges de Bouh  lier's approach appears in the scenes depicting the people of Thebes. It is partially a development of the Greek chorus, but here their reactions to the events become almost as important as Oedipus' own. This creates a new sub-plot helping the author to express his message. The Theban citizens, with their leader Arsak  s, unlike the noble and generous Oedipus are only concerned with their own well-being. When a rumor spreads that Oedipus may go back to Corinth, they accuse him of treason to his people, and at the final revelation their pitiless hatred and cruel projects of revenge make the resigned and self-sacrificing Oedipus appear as a Christ-like saviour. The recognition to be achieved in this play is not so much Oedipus' recognition as the people's: a final change in their fickle attitude has to make them understand that if even a king can experience such a reverse of fortune, this is because he is a human being like all of them, and nobody is ever protected against such a destiny. "Lourdes brutes", says Creon, "Ignorez-vous donc un secret / Que la fatalit   r  cente / Partout a ses victimes? Quelqu'un / Est-il s  r de ne pas mal faire?" (p. 223). In this edifying atmosphere suicide would be out of place, and the play concludes on a mysterious, sacred dance of Jocasta.

The humiliated Oedipus who asks everybody for forgiveness is far from the Nietzschean hero triumphing by his willpower, and the crying crowd at the end has nothing in common with a Dionysiac frenzy.

JEAN COCTEAU : OEDIPE-ROI

As a development of the noble intentions expressed in the preface, Saint-Georges de Bouhélier's Oedipe is disappointing.¹ Jean Cocteau's techniques for adaptation of great ancient works is perhaps the best indirect comment and reaction to the naturalist treatment. To revive old masterpieces Cocteau wants to discover the skeleton, the very core of the work, rather than add new decorations under which the essence of the original will be lost. Cocteau compares what he has done in his Antigone (1922)² and Oedipe-roi³ to the restoration of paintings:

Il s'agissait moins d'une esquisse rapide que de retendre un vieux chef-d'oeuvre, le déridier, débayer ses matières mortes, enlever la patine qui donne le change à la longue sur une oeuvre médiocre mais n'ajoute rien aux chefs-d'oeuvre, quoi qu'on en dise.⁴

¹In 1900, A. Gide had already noticed a similar discrepancy between Bouhélier's promises of a literary renaissance and his actual work; what Gide disliked most in him was his self-complacency, a characteristic that is true of this work, too; cf. Prétextes (Paris: Mercure de France, 1926), pp. 225-226, 236.

²First performed 16 January 1923; in J. Cocteau, Théâtre I (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

³Oedipe-roi, adaptation libre d'après Sophocle (Paris: Plon, 1928); this version finished in 1925, but performed in 1936 only is very close to the libretto text Cocteau wrote for Igor Stravinsky's opera-oratorio, Oedipus-Rex (1927), J. Daniélou translated it into Latin which adds to the religious character of the work; this short play corresponds also to Act IV of his La Machine infernale.

⁴ibid., p. 2.

The action of this shortened version stays close to Sophocles, though some passages are reduced to a minimum, such as the one-line choral ode: "Le culte des dieux s'en va."⁵ The most striking innovation is perhaps the representation of the chorus, a recumbent golden statue on a pedestal with an actor behind who speaks through its open mouth. Cocteau's tragedy, unlike that of Sophocles, is written for an indoor theatre; walls on three sides should suggest an ideal place for a trap of the gods. The decor helps him to create an atmosphere that conveys his interpretation of the tragedy, and the prologue foreshadows La Machine infernale: "Un homme au comble de la chance découvre en un jour qu'il était joué par les dieux sans coeur."⁶

We have seen how in the works of Péladan and Hofmannsthal the episode of the sphinx is the climax of the play, and that it can give, even in Pannwitz' Thebais ("Tiresias"), a clue to their interpretation of the myth. It appears that for three French Oedipus plays of the 1930s, by A. Gide, J. Cocteau, and H. Ghéon, an approach through the sphinx and her enigma is possible, too. It is striking how, in different ways, this encounter helped them to express the meaning that Oedipus' destiny has in their eyes. But before looking at these plays a few general considerations on various attitudes toward such a mythical figure will lead one to see its function in the Oedipus treatments.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 9.

In relation to this play and I. Stravinsky's work, another opera should be mentioned: Oedipe, by the Roumanian composer Georges Enesco (1881-1955), for which Edmond Fleg wrote the libretto; it was first performed at the Opéra in Paris in 1936. The action (in four acts) goes beyond the two Sophoclean tragedies, it begins with the birth of Oedipus while the second act presents the palace of Polybus, the murder of Laius and the encounter with the sphinx; the two last parts correspond to Sophocles' tragedies.

The presentation of the sphinx raises the problem of the purely imaginary, irrational aspects of the myth. As long as people believe that such fantastic beings or events could be true, or, at least, were true for some very remote ages, their existence in the story is accepted as that of any other being or event. But when this attitude is no longer there, the interest for such episodes is lost (or they appeal for reasons similar to that of a fairy tale). Thus to later readers and spectators of Oedipus who no longer share the belief in Greek oracles and prophecies, these become highly improbable, and some later interpreters tried to adapt them to the "beliefs" of their time, whether they are religious (Seneca is an example), or psychological (as in Hofmannsthal).

Even less convincing than the oracles was the nature of the sphinx, and already in the 5th century B.C., the Greek tragedians omitted her from their works.⁷ Now that the 20th century has re-introduced this incredible element, the various different means of interpreting myth in general, have to be distinguished. The allegorical interpretation started as early as the 6th century B.C. with explanations of the Homeric gods as personifications of natural forces. The myth in such a view always has an underlying hidden meaning and is seen as an illustration either of a moral principle or a natural process. The difference from the rationalist theories is not always very clear, but an allegorical interpretation refers to everlasting, regularly recurring natural phenomena, or universal ethical principles, while

⁷ Except for a satyr play, which is significant, too; it is Aeschylus' lost satyr play, The Sphinx, which followed his Theban trilogy.

the rationalist explains them as historic events which actually took place, but were later transformed into supernatural occurrences by the addition of marvelous elements. In short, an allegorical interpretation of the sphinx makes her the mouthpiece of an idea without worrying about her nature, while a rationalist interpretation explains her appearance (generally by discovering her human nature), and shows the reasons for the development of the myth. Of course, both theories can be combined, or even be linked to a third, less scientific approach, that of the so-called paradoxographers⁸ who will still add to some of the fantastic aspects, as one treatment of this century also shows.

In both Péladan and Hofmannsthal's plays, the encounter with the sphinx is presented as a real event happening on or just behind the stage, and her monstrous nature is pointed out by such details as the bones of former victims scattered around the rock, or by the arrival of a dying old man. Yet neither of them dared to present her physically to the audience, and her allegorical function can hardly be denied. For Péladan's Oedipus, she is an obstacle that he, stimulated by his love for Jocasta and by his own will-power, is able to overcome; for Hofmannsthal's hypersensitive Oedipus, on the other hand, her message is another expression of his subconscious dream that he had first "seen" through the Delphic oracle, while her running away reminds him of his impotence. Pannwitz (and Péladan, too, but less explicitly), by insisting on the answer itself, made this trivial riddle the key to their attitude toward the myth.

⁸Cf. Robert, p. 496; see below, p. 120.

It is striking that in the three plays, by A. Gide, J. Cocteau, and H. Ghéon, the sphinx and her enigma again play a central role, which allows a common approach that is able to show significant differences in interpretation as well as in form.

ANDRE GIDE : OEDIPE¹

In A. Gide's Oedipe (1931) the victory over the sphinx and the solution of the riddle are essential themes for his interpretation of the myth.² But unlike the early Oedipus plays of this century, he has chosen the same dramatic situation as had his classical predecessors, Sophocles, Seneca, Corneille, and Voltaire. All through the play the past events are recalled, not so much to see their logical sequence and interrelation, but as stages of Oedipus' intellectual and spiritual progress, and it appears that the encounter with the sphinx was a decisive point. In the play, except for a few allusions, her nature is first discussed in the second act by Eteocles and Polynices, two disillusioned and free-thinking intellectuals. They come to compare thinking, in particular its subconscious aspect, with a sphinx; Polynices, the poet, first describes it :

¹ André Gide (1869-1951), Oedipe, Drame en trois actes (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), first staged in Antwerp, December 10th, 1931, and in 1932 in Paris, at the Théâtre de l'Avenue, in a mise-en-scène by Georges Pitoëff; the edition used here is, Gide: Oedipe, and Cocteau: La Machine infernale, ed. G. Brée, The Laurel Language Library (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968).

² To avoid repetition of what has been said in many former studies on this play and on Gide's general attitude toward myth and antiquity, I have restricted my approach here to the symbolic meaning of the sphinx and her riddle, as this is a characteristic aspect of 20th century Oedipus plays; it is surprising how in Gide's play it is generally ignored; for Gide's attitude toward the Greek myth, see H. Watson-Williams, André Gide and the Greek myth, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

Ne te demandes-tu jamais jusqu'où n'irait point la pensée? Dans ma dernière Ode, je la compare à un dragon dont nous ne connaîtrions le plus souvent que le corps et la queue, ce qui traîne dans le passé; un sphinx que je sens promener en moi son muflle invisible, flairant tout, reniflant tout, promenant partout une curiosité attentatoire. Et le reste suit comme il peut.

(Acte II, p. 76)

This parody of Freudian ideas is, on one hand, a striking modernization reinforced by Eteocles who calls the dragon, "le mal du siècle," on the other hand, to stress the anachronism, it is related to the traditional monsters of Theban history.³ The conclusion that since Oedipus has killed the last sphinx, all monsters and gods are within man,⁴ is similar to the interiorized oracle of Hofmannsthal. Psychological explanation is a modern kind of rationalist attitude toward myth. Oedipus himself has understood the encounter with the sphinx as a universal, human experience when he relates his victory in one of the key passages of the play:

Car, comprenez bien, mes petits, que chacun de nous, adolescent, rencontre, au début de sa course, un monstre qui dresse devant lui telle énigme qui nous puisse empêcher d'avancer. Et, bien qu'à chacun de nous, mes enfants, ce sphinx particulier pose une question différente, persuadez-vous qu'à chacune de ses questions la réponse reste pareille; oui, qu'il n'y a qu'une seule et même réponse à de si diverses questions; et que cette réponse unique, c'est: l'Homme; et que cet homme unique, pour un chacun de nous, c'est: Soi.

(Acte II, p. 78)

³In fact this detail as well as the introduction of Oedipus' children shows a clever and very personal assimilation of Euripides' Phoenissae in the Oedipus Tyrannus; for the allusions to Theban history, see above, p. 14.

⁴"les monstres ni les dieux ne sont plus parmi les airs ou les campagnes; mais en nous." (acte II, p. 77).

The answer to the riddle is well known, but not the interpretation of this word "man". Gide's Oedipe certainly does not understand in the Delphian sense of "know thyself", that he is no more than any other mortal man. Significant is the epigraph to the first act, taken from Sophocles' Antigone: "Beaucoup de choses sont admirables; mais rien n'est plus admirable que l'homme." For Oedipus the solution to the enigma is absolute individualism, the self alone counts, and makes man his own and only god. It was on his way to Delphi, where he wanted to consult Apollo about his origin, that Oedipus had changed his route, turned toward Thebes, and thus met the sphinx. Here he did not have to listen to a divine answer but could solve the riddle himself. Triumphant in his success, ever since that moment, as Tiresias makes him realize, he has blindly lived in an illusionary happiness. At the end of his dialogue with the priest,⁵ Oedipus eventually awakes from his dream-like state in which, intoxicated by the victory over the sphinx and his passion for Jocasta, Péladan and Hofmannsthal had left him at the end of their plays:

... Je me sentais moi-même une réponse à je ne savais encore quelle question. Ce fut celle du Sphinx. Je l'ai vaincu, moi, perspicace. Mais, depuis, tout n'a-t-il pas été pour moi s'obscurcissant? Mais depuis, mais depuis ... Qu'as-tu fait, Oedipe? Engourdi dans la récompense, je dors depuis vingt ans. Mais à présent, enfin, j'écoute en moi le monstre nouveau qui s'étire. Un grand destin m'attend, tapi dans les ombres du soir. Oedipe, le temps de la quiétude est passé. Réveille-toi de ton bonheur.

(Acte II, p. 81)

⁵ Gide himself considered this to the central part of the play, cf. André Gide - Roger Martin du Gard. Correspondance 1913-1934 (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 442.

This new monster that Oedipus has to face is the recognition of his true situation. Having recovered his old perspicacity he does not need the help of the shepherds, and understands by himself. He had given the right answer to the riddle, but: "Quoi! De l'autre côté du Sphinx, c'est donc là ce qui se cachait!" He who thought that he had won his liberation from the ties of religion, and was boasting to be socially completely independent because of his illegitimate and unknown origin, now has to see what the real consequences of his victory were. Not the incest as such horrifies him, but the fact that he is married with Jocasta, his whole past: "... j'épousai ma mère, hélas! hélas! et avec elle tout mon passé. Ah! je comprends à présent pourquoi ma valeur dormait. En vain m'appelait l'avenir. Jocaste me tirait en arrière ..."

(Acte III, p. 84).

It is the recognition of the failure of his egoistic individualism; Delphi could not be ignored, and Tiresias was right in showing him his illusions. But the conflict was not as simple as it appeared in the eyes of the priest, between Delphi and the Sphinx. Only after having killed his father - and for this fulfilment of the oracle the gods alone were responsible - had he felt guilty and kept away from Delphi. So even now he does not follow Tiresias, but becomes his equal through his blinding which in the eyes of the priest, who had asked for his repentance, is another sign of his sinful pride. Oedipus refuses any external authority, he breaks all social links by giving up his kingship and leaving the conservative and narrow-minded Thebes represented by Creon.⁶ The conclusion is a reconciliation of Oedipus with his destiny of homeless and suffering man. It is a superior kind of individualism where the enigma of the Sphinx is seen in a new

⁶This is Gide's answer to M. Barrès' Les Déracinés, whose ideas are caricatured in Creon.

light: the ideal of man is no longer restricted to the individual self but extended to the happiness of mankind. Wherever Oedipus goes, he will find men: "Quels qu'ils soient, ce sont des hommes. Au prix de ma souffrance, il m'est doux de leur apporter du bonheur." (III, p. 91).

Though Gide was sixty years old when he finished his Oedipe, and intended it at that time to be his last work, it is very youthful in spirit. He himself was pleased with the result, and he found that he had put into it all that he wanted. But it seems however, that many of his modernizations are there only for their surprising and shocking effect. The language in particular appears too arbitrarily anachronistic, Tiresias speaking like a Christian priest in relation to Delphi, while Antigone intends to take holy orders, and Creon's comments reduce the tragedy to a family scandal. And yet it is never pure parody, all the dialogues are discussions of conflicts in which the author seems genuinely involved himself. The ideas count as much as the dramatic action, but the progress of these conflicts and their final resolution is not too clear, at least not for the spectator.

In a manner characteristic of many writers of our century dealing with Oedipus, Gide was more interested in the character of the hero than in the dramatic perfection of Sophocles' tragedy. Thus it is not surprising that he was better able to give a conclusion to his ideas on Oedipus in a non-dramatic work, Thésée.⁷ Finished in 1944, this is a prose work of a particular kind, it is Gide's own will but presented through Theseus, King of Athens, who as an old man recalls his life and gives a final assessment of his convictions. He meets Oedipus who now lives

⁷ Paris: Gallimard, 1946; all page references to this edition are given in the text.

under his protection in Colonus which, of course, is an idea from Sophocles. In some respects Thésée can also be compared to Pannwitz' Thebais, and more particularly to "Kadmos".⁸ In both works Oedipus is presented through one of his contemporaries, and for the confrontation of their ideas the dialogue appears to be a more appropriate form than drama.⁹

However different the characters of Theseus and Oedipus are, there are a few corresponding stages in their lives that show their divergent attitudes. Like Oedipus, Theseus had destroyed a monster, the Minotaur; but if the Theban King, intoxicated by this triumph stayed inactive afterwards in an illusionary happiness, Theseus proved to be a much more realistically minded and active man. He explicitly states his ideals to be in opposition with those of the Beotians:

Il est un temps de vaincre, disais-je à Pirithoüs,
de purger la terre de ses monstres, puis un
temps de cultiver et de porter à fruit la terre
heureusement amendée; un temps de libérer les
hommes de la crainte, puis un temps d'occuper
leur liberté, de mener à profit et à fleur leur
aisance. Et cela ne se pouvait sans discipline

⁸ see above, p. 91.

⁹ "A la N.R.F., je rencontre Malraux qui me parle de mon Oedipe. 'Oui, me dit-il en riant, Oedipe échappe au Sphinx; mais c'est pour se laisser bouffer enfin par sa fille ... Vous devriez écrire un Oedipe à Colone, où Oedipe, avant de mourir, repousserait même Antigone'.

Et j'imagine, en manière d'épilogue, un dialogue entre Oedipe et Thésée. Je songe à une vie de Thésée (oh! j'y songe depuis longtemps) où se placerait (ce que j'invente seulement aujourd'hui, dans le train qui m'emmène à Cuverville) une rencontre décisive des deux héros, se mesurant l'un à l'autre et éclairant, l'une à la faveur de l'autre, leurs deux vies." Journal: 1889-1939, 18 Janvier 1931, pp. 1021-1022.

je n'admis pas que l'homme s'en tînt à lui-même,
à la manière des Béotiens, ni qu'il cherchât sa
fin dans un médiocre bonheur. (p. 107)

He tells this to his former friend, Pirithoüs, whose attitude is similar to that of Oedipus. Satisfied with one heroic deed he recommends that Theseus do the same, "repose-toi dans la gloire acquise et dans le bonheur conjugal." (p. 109)

Oedipus is not alone in having experienced a scandal in his family: the tragedy of Phaedra and Hippolytus even made Theseus responsible for his son's death. But what counts above all for him is his public work, the foundation of Athens, the cradle of civilisation.¹⁰ This makes his life on the whole, except for such "minor errors" that he tries to forget, appear as a great success, while the life of Oedipus is an ultimate failure, personal and public, too, with the destruction of Thebes. Theseus respects him as his equal, but cannot understand why he has blinded himself. Oedipus explains the new kind of light that is guiding him now, his continual contemplation of the divine has led to a complete rejection of the world experienced with our senses. This dichotomy Theseus cannot admit, he is a man of this world, a hero, whereas Oedipus is a kind of resigned saint for whom true greatness is only achieved by the suffering victim. In this contemplative life, man no longer counts, but Theseus (and Gide) through his work has given his explanation of the riddle of the sphinx.

¹⁰ Cf. Pannwitz in whose work and thought Kadmos and the foundation of Thebes play a similar role, see above, p. 14.

Si je compare à celui d'Oedipe mon destin, je suis content: je l'ai rempli. Derrière moi, je laisse la cité d'Athènes. Plus encore que ma femme et mon fils, je l'ai chérie. J'ai fait ma ville. Après moi saura l'habiter immortellement ma pensée. C'est consentant que j'approche la mort solitaire. J'ai goûté des biens de la terre. Il m'est doux de penser qu'après moi, grâce à moi, les hommes se reconnaîtront plus heureux, meilleurs et plus libres. Pour le bien de l'humanité future, j'ai fait mon oeuvre. J'ai vécu. (p. 123)

This is close to Oedipus' final message in the play, but all he would do for mankind lies in the benediction promised by the gods to the country where he is buried. But Theseus' achievement is due to his own deeds, which before his death give him the satisfaction of having fulfilled the mission of his life.

JEAN COCTEAU : LA MACHINE INFERNALE

In Gide's modernization of the tragedy there is the two-fold tendency of rationalizing by an overall attempt to set the myth in a contemporary background, and by giving a psychological explanation of the sphinx, while her enigma can easily be seen as allegorical. After Nietzsche's superman-Oedipus, and the noble king of Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, in Gide, for the first time, an anti-heroic trend appears. Oedipus no longer appears as a royal character, but as an almost ordinary man of this century. The emphasis on everyday - or not so everyday - problems with his children, the obvious "desacralization" of the situation, the language, all this makes it a sequence of unexpected effects that shatter the traditional views.

Such a paradoxical treatment reaches its climax in Cocteau's second much freer version of the myth, La Machine Infernale,¹ produced by Louis Jouvet, in 1934, at the Théâtre de l'Athénée. On the surface it appears as a charming play of fantasy, compared to which Gide's constant search for anachronisms is a strained superimposition. Cocteau's modernization is not achieved by an intellectual discussion: these problems are under the surface which is first to captivate reader and audience by its magic visual and language effects.

It is interesting to consider the play in the context of other adaptations of the myth to appreciate its share of originality and Cocteau's power of transformation.

¹Paris: Grasset, 1934; the edition here used is, Gide: Oedipe; Cocteau: La Machine infernale, ed. G. Brée, The Laurel Language Library (New York : Dell Publishing Co., 1968).

As he had shown by his earlier adaptation Oedipe-roi, he believed that the classical model could only appeal to the 20th century in a shortened form, restricted to the bare essentials. If in this play he wants to expand the action he has to do so by including preceding events, and thus he adds three significant moments preceding the action. The two first, "Le Fantôme," and "La rencontre d'Oedipe et du Sphinx," describe two simultaneous incidents, both warnings by the ghost of Laius and the Sphinx-Nemesis, which, however, neither Jocasta nor Oedipus understand. For Cocteau's assimilating imagination the logical sequence of time is not important, and so, though happening at a much earlier moment than in the original versions, his ghost scene is a parody in the Shakespearean manner of Seneca's evocation of the dead.² But here it has become a complete reversion of the Latin, highly ritualized ceremony. The dark sacred wood is changed into a city wall which the ghost likes because of the near-by sewers! In the Senecan version with its Etruscan overtones the dead could only communicate with the seer, while here Tiresias (and the queen) cannot perceive it, and it only appears to the trembling soldiers. In Seneca his message may have sounded obscure, but here he is not even able to formulate the warning. This failure, foreshadowing the tragedy, is not noticed by the two ludicrous characters, the neurotic Jocasta with her foreign accent and manners and her companion, Zizi-Tiresias.

The encounter with the Sphinx, to which Cocteau at first wanted to restrict his play, is certainly the most puzzling part with its paradoxical metamorphoses of the monster into a beautiful young girl, a dog, and eventually Nemesis. To understand who such a

²This episode had also appeared, in shortened and partially Christian form in the French classic versions.

being is, seems only possible to the imagination of a child or a poet,³ and significantly it is only the little boy who recognizes the Sphinx. It is generally admitted that these devices are original inventions of Cocteau's imagination, yet literary history, paintings and other representations, as well as folklore explanations of the sphinx' nature show that this is not absolutely true. But before going into a more detailed analysis of this second act, the novel aspects of the rest of the play should be noticed. In the morbid atmosphere of Act III, "La nuit de nocces," the parody of Freudian theories is easily recognized, especially in both Jocasta's and Oedipus' nightmares. But as inversion of a traditional element of the myth, Oedipus' interview with Tiresias is magnificently drawn. Instead of the seer warning him, it is Oedipus himself who reads his future in the eyes of Tiresias who does not know these facts yet. But Oedipus, who only sees his happiness and then suddenly turns blind when he comes to look at the disastrous consequences, remains in the traditional illusion about his own situation, and neither he nor Tiresias understand the meaning of this momentary loss of sight.

In the fourth part Cocteau has combined Sophocles' and Seneca's ending, Jocasta hangs herself as she does in the Greek version, but she and Oedipus will meet again as they do in Seneca. After his blinding he alone is able to see her, and after her death here they are eventually reconciled as mother and son: "La femme est morte pendue, Oedipe. Je suis la mère. C'est ta mère qui vient à ton aide ..." She and Antigone lead him away, and the last two words, spoken by Tiresias, summarize the impression left by the play: "Qui sait?"

³This is the kind of attitude Cocteau asks from his readers; cf. Tiresias, he says that the new power belongs "Au peuple, aux poètes, aux coeurs purs" (Acte IV, p. 199).

If Oedipus could not see in time the tragedy prepared for him, the reader is warned at the beginning:

Regarde, spectateur, remontée à bloc, de telle sorte que le ressort se déroule avec lenteur tout le long d'une vie humaine, une des plus parfaites machines construites par les dieux infernaux pour l'anéantissement mathématique d'un mortel. (Act I, p. 99)

Yet the reader and even more the spectator will first be fascinated by the surprising details alone that cover the infernal machine, above all by the Sphinx. After having recalled Cocteau's presentation it will be possible to compare it to similar devices of adaptation and possible sources. The Sphinx first appears as a young girl in a white dress sitting among the ruins of an old temple, with Anubis, the jackal-like Egyptian god of death next to her. The association is easily understood as the Sphinx is of Egyptian origin, and is also sometimes described as having the body of a dog;⁴ it is Anubis who here receives her victims. The startling aspect about the Sphinx is that she is as disillusioned with her "job" and as puzzled by the enigmas of life as many young people are. The contrast between this innocent-looking girl and the consequences of her devourings exaggerated by the obsessed Thebans, is stressed in her peaceful chat with a Theban woman whose son is "mort au Sphinx"!

At the arrival of Oedipus the situation becomes more ambiguous. She remains the charming young girl, desperately in love with him, until she disappears into the pedestal, a clever device as the stage indications show:

⁴Cf. Aeschylus, Fragment Sphinx 215, Euripides' Oedipus Tyrannus 301, also, Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, Oedipe, Roi de Thèbes: "la chienne ailée" (II, 1).

Oedipe compte. On sent qu'il se passe un événement extraordinaire. Le Sphinx bondit à travers les ruines, disparaît derrière le mur et reparaît, engagé dans le socle praticable, c'est-à-dire qu'il semble accroché au socle, le buste dressé sur les coudes, la tête droite, alors que l'actrice se tient debout, ne laissant paraître que son buste et ses bras couverts de gants mouchetés, les mains griffant le rebord, que l'aile brisée donne naissance à des ailes subites, immenses, pâles, lumineuses, et que le fragment de statue la complètent, la prolongent et paraissent lui appartenir (Act II, p. 147).

She then reveals to him the usual tortures in a magnificent play of words, exercising a spell that paralyses Oedipus who forgets that all this is only a verbal strangling⁵ and that the rest of the experience is expressed in the conditional mood. In this same way she tells him the answer to the riddle that he would have to give, so that when afterwards she has to ask him at Anubis' request, he, of course, knows the right solution, and triumphantly runs away. Now the second metamorphosis of the Sphinx takes place: disappointed that he did not show the slightest sign of gratefulness, her love that had saved him turns into hatred, and she is transformed into Nemesis.⁶ This means that her body as well as that of Anubis - both being gods - are really only shadows. When Oedipus comes back to take her skin, the trophy of his victory, she gives him her body of a young girl with the head of Anubis to give it the appearance of a monster. The act ends, similar to the last scenes in Péladan and Hofmannsthal, but here with, at

⁵ This is one of the most fascinating passages: "Et je parle, je travaille, je dévide, je déroule, je calcule, je médite, je tresse, je vanne, je tricote, je natte, je croise, je passe, je repasse, je noue et dénoue et renoue ..." some thirty-five verbs to make him experience her strangling!

⁶ Her real nature seems to be Nemesis, and by his answer, Oedipus has destroyed her as Sphinx; this explains her disgust at killing which is not her true job; folklore studies show that the contest of the riddle often involves the liberation of souls in purgatory, cf. Delcourt, pp. 104-140.

the back, the ominous, huge veiled figures of the two gods, Death and Nemesis.⁷

The originality of such a paradoxical presentation, perhaps too fantastic for logical minds, seems unique. How surprising is it then to read the following comment on late Greek Oedipus versions written after the Phoenissae and the Oedipus at Colonus:

Ist ... ein Stoff von der Poesie so völlig ausgeschöpft, dann kann es wohl geschehen und geschieht wohl auch zumeist, dass man ihm durch frei ersonnene, verblüffende Motive, die um so drastischer wirken, je stärker und fester die empfangene Prägung ist, einen neuen Reiz zu geben versucht. Das ist das Bestreben der Paradoxie und des mit ihr nah verwandten Rationalismus, und das Kind beider ist die Kaine Historia. Auch an der Oidipussage hat sich das löbliche Paar versucht, zumal es in der Sphinx einen willkommenen Angriffspunkt fand.⁸

So the 20th century is not at all the first to reinterpret this mysterious being, and indeed the ancient proved to have an imaginative resourcefulness that contemporary writers have difficulties to compete with.

⁷Surface and underlying machine appear in the comments of Nemesis contrasted with those of Oedipus: "J'épouserai la reine Jocaste!" - "Les pauvres, pauvres, pauvres hommes ... Je n'en peux plus, Anubis ... J'étouffe. Quittons la terre!" - "Je serai roi!"

⁸Robert, p. 494. He actually compares these ancient attempts at novelty with the contemporary plays by G. Prellwitz and H. von Hofmannsthal, which he however contemptuously rejects: "Versuche ... dem ehrwürdigen Stoff moderne Pikanterien aufzudrängen, Experimente, die anmuten, als ob man in die Höhlungen einer alten Eiche Blumentöpfe mit Vergissmeinnicht oder Orchideen setzen wollte" (p. 494). This is surprising as he calls, in the next paragraph (quoted above), the paradoxical and rationalist treatments, "das löbliche Paar".

In one version the Sphinx is said to be a maenad (probably transformed by Dionysus together with the daughters of Cadmus), in another she appears as a Theban prophetess always misunderstood by the Thebans who, acting contrarily to what she told them to do, eventually perish.⁹ In an attempt to link her to the Theban race, she was also considered to be a daughter of Laius and sister of Oedipus, where then the contest becomes a rivalry for the throne.¹⁰ Almost everywhere there is a tendency to humanize her, an interpretation on which Cocteau's most surprising effects were based, too. For some she was a highway robber, an explanation that the French Sphinx suggests herself to the Theban woman, asking her if she is afraid of robbers, while the Thebans also accuse her of plundering. Allusions to a sexual relation can be found in the version of Socrates of Argos, and in later Byzantine developments.¹¹ The most striking relation is perhaps with some details of the interpretation by Palaiphatos.¹² The Sphinx here, is the first wife of Cadmus, an Amazon whom he has brought from the Orient. After his marriage to Harmonia she becomes very angry and flees with part of the citizens to the Phikian hills from where she starts her war against Thebes. The interesting

⁹Version by Socrates of Argos, cf. Robert, p. 495-496.

¹⁰Lysimachos, in Thebaica paradoxa; cf. Robert, p. 496.

¹¹Cf. Robert, p. 502.

¹²Cf. Robert, pp. 498-500; also W. Nestle, Vom Mythos zum Logos (Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, 1942), pp. 148-151; Palaiphatos who is supposed to have been a disciple of Aristotle, gives in his Peri Apiston the most systematic rationalist interpretation of the myths, showing everywhere the original event that gave rise to the myth; he proves to have had a wide knowledge in history, geography, ethnography, and etymology.

part in connection with Cocteau is that she is accompanied by a dog (and Oedipus by a horse). The only way Robert can justify the presence of the dog is by assuming that it signifies the monstrous nature of the Sphinx, as in Cocteau; it should explain her animal body, just as Anubis' head makes a monster of the modern Sphinx.

One of the most paradoxical, yet very significant aspects of both Hofmannsthal's and Cocteau's Sphinx episodes, is that Oedipus does not answer, or even appear to know, the solution to the riddle, and only by chance does he escape destruction. A similar inversion is mentioned in a scholium to the Phoenissae: Oedipus, thinking hard to find the answer, happens to put his index finger against his forehead; the Sphinx who thinks he is indicating himself, and thus man in general, considers her riddle solved, and kills herself.¹³ The allusion to Oedipus' illusionary knowledge is obvious. From such striking similarities in approach it is however not possible to assume a direct influence on 20th century adaptations. The significant aspect lies in the continuity of the literary tradition, conscious or unconscious, in the recurrence of the same devices for renewal and explanation used in antiquity as well as by Cocteau.

Unlike Péladan and Hofmannsthal,¹⁴ Cocteau puts much more importance on the physical appearance of the Sphinx, on the visual effect which is an essential part of the whole play. He must have consulted paintings and other works of art representing the Sphinx. The most famous generally present her as sitting on top of a column (or a column-like rock), as she also appears in the

¹³Schol. Phoin. 50; cf. Robert, p. 508.

¹⁴In Gide, where there is no description of the encounter at all, the contest with the sphinx has eventually only the symbolic meaning of a spiritual crisis.

French play.¹⁵ If in the original version of the myth, Oedipus had probably to kill her in a regular fight,¹⁶ the traditional representation based on the intellectual contest of the enigma has lost this monstrous aspect.¹⁷ The Greek, unlike the Egyptian sphinx, is female and has wings, two details noticed by Cocteau.¹⁸ Even the description of her nature, however fantastically it is presented, corresponds in all its details to scholarly interpretations of the sphinx. Cocteau may have found this information in a French dictionary of classical antiquity, like the Daremberg-Saglio, where it says under "sphinx":

Le monstre célèbre de la légende thébaine [Oedipus.] n'est qu'une application particulière d'une conception générale, celle de démons ravisseurs, de génies funèbres qui enlèvent les vivants. Les sphinx, dont le nom signifie étrangleurs, sont de la grande famille des esprits malfaisants, des Kères, des Erinyes, des Harpyes et des Sirènes.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. Delcourt, p. 136; she interprets the column as a funeral symbol as well as a sign of the Sphinx' isolation.

¹⁶ Cf. Robert, p. 49.

¹⁷ Cf. Delcourt, p. 130.

¹⁸ The sphinx is of Egyptian origin, but had been introduced in Greece via Chaldea and Asia Minor, and the female sex is an Oriental characteristic, as well as the wings; Sophocles, too, had called her a "winged virgin" (Oed. Tyr., l. 508), and the same description is found in the Phoenissae (ll. 806, 1019, 1042). One reason for the paradoxical effect of the female sphinx is due to the French male gender: "le sphinx" (German: "die Sphinx").

¹⁹ Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines, vol. 4, edited by Ch. Daremberg and Edm. Saglio (Paris: Hachette, 1911), p. 1431; it is more plausible that Cocteau consulted this French dictionary than the German study by C. Robert, Ödipus, op.cit., or the huge German dictionary of classical antiquity, Pauly-Wissowa, though they contain more information on the myth than the French one does.

This association with funeral spirits explains the presence of Anubis, while the relation with the Erinyes justifies the Sphinx' metamorphosis into Nemesis.²⁰ The Daremberg dictionary also summarizes the rationalist and paradoxical treatments by mythographers, and it mentions her vampire nature which could explain the association in Cocteau with the story that the Theban woman tells the Sphinx about a vampire lady. It is significant that there is a reference to the version of the chance solution, as well as to the erotic aspect of the experience.

In a more recent study, Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant (1944), Marie Delcourt, who sees in the conquest of power the main theme of the myth, considers the victory over the sphinx as the central episode, for the sphinx alone gives Oedipus power. She gives a twofold explanation of the sphinx, she is an oppressive nightmare, as well as the apparition of the soul of a dead person, both views having in common an erotic character.²¹ Such an interpretation allows us to establish a deeper link between the Sphinx episode and the rest of Cocteau's play. Her funeral aspect can be associated with the ghost of Laius, and its nightmarish, obsessive nature with "La nuit de nocces", where the Sphinx is resurrected in the shape of a fur on the floor. The end of the play reveals that the unnatural phenomena of the first acts are not mere loose pageants of fantasy, but they appear to be interlinked by their disastrous consequences.

²⁰Péladan too, had some knowledge of these explanations of the sphinx when he calls her kère in the 1897 text, but in the 1903 version for the stage performance he adds a note saying that he left out such scholarly references on purpose.

²¹"L'être mythique que les Grecs ont fini par appeler Sphinx est né dans leur esprit de deux déterminations superposées. L'une est une réalité physiologique, le cauchemar opprimant, l'autre est d'ordre religieux, c'est la croyance aux âmes des morts représentées avec des ailes." (p. 108-109)

These pseudo-scientific explanations of the Sphinx have helped to show the unity of the work, and confirm the underlying tragedy of the infernal machine. The surface alone is burlesque, and the genius of Cocteau lies in the combination of both levels of meaning. The dictionary and other sources cannot explain this. It is the particular charm of his own writing. The obvious echoes from the 20th century psychology, especially from Freud and his followers, have often been noticed in this play,²² but in connection with the tradition of the Oedipus myth in literature, the similarities in approach with early paradoxical and rationalist versions are a more significant aspect that shows ever recurring devices in the reinterpretation of certain episodes.

²²Cf. A. Belli, "The Psychoanalytic Approach, Jean Cocteau, La Machine Infernale", in, Ancient Greek Myths and Modern Drama (New York: New York University Press, 1969), pp. 3-19; she also recognizes the importance of the sphinx, but in terms of modern psychology; she bases her interpretation on Otto Rank's work, The Trauma of Birth (1924), where the sphinx is a symbol of primal anxiety that Oedipus has to overcome on his way back to his mother, as well as a mother symbol. Cocteau was probably aware of such theories but the author of this study is wrong in insisting on the originality of Cocteau's addition of the ghost of Laius, and of the sphinx as a young girl in love; both reflect old elements of the myth already present in earlier literary treatments.

HENRI GHEON: OEDIPE OU LE CREPUSCULE DES DIEUX

The next Oedipus play in France is again based on an entirely different approach to the myth. In Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux Henri Ghéon¹ has given a Christian version of the themes of salvation and love which links his only adaptation of a classical tragedy with the rest of his works, all dealing with religious subjects. Converted to Catholicism in the First World War, he afterwards wrote more than a hundred plays on lives of saints, as well as miracle and mystery plays. They were performed on bare, unsophisticated stages by the company he had founded, "Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame". By this drama, where Franciscan simplicity often goes along with burlesque and farcical elements, he intended to create a worldtheatre similar to that of Calderon. Such an interest in both ancient and medieval or Renaissance drama has already been pointed out in Hofmannsthal and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier. But Oedipe stands alone in Ghéon's work, he kept the publication back, nor had it been staged when he died in 1944. The first performances took place in the West of France in 1951, shortly before its publication. But in his critical work, L'Art du Théâtre, he expresses his attitude toward Sophocles: he admires him for having spoken to all people, yet, for him, drama is mainly a spoken art born in a social environment; hence the great works of the past can never be entirely reconstructed, which justifies his adaptation of Oedipus.²

¹H. Ghéon, pseudonym of Dr. Henri Vangeon (1875-1944), Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux, tragédie en quatre actes et cinq tableaux (Paris: Plon, 1952).

²L'Art du Théâtre: quatre causeries inédites données au Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier en 1923 et complétées en 1939 par un appendice "Quinze ans après" (Montréal: Ed. Serge, 1944), cf. pp. 22-24; 188

Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux is by its structure and interpretation a Christian mystery play, stretching from the cruelty of the (pagan) oracle to the annunciation of a new (Christian) life, the secrets of the oracle and of the sphinx becoming mysteries of faith. In his four pageants Ghéon presents the marriage of Laius and Jocasta followed by the birth and the exposure of Oedipus, the marriage with his mother, the anagnorisis, and the half traditional, half personal conclusion.

The play written in a Biblical type of verses, opens on a double choral song that sets the main theme of the play:

L'homme mortel marche vers son destin,
Comme le voyageur qui descend vers le sud, face au
soleil.
Il croit puiser l'évidence dans la lumière
Et l'éblouissement creuse un abîme de ténèbres
devant ses regards et ses pas ...

La cité mortelle est sans yeux.
Aveugle, elle se confie aux aveugles ...
- Tremble cité mortelle! Le grain doré que tu
entasses dans tes granges
Ne répond pas des belles moissons à venir.

This double warning is given by old Theban citizens on the day of Laius' and Jocasta's wedding when the whole city participates in the joy of their royal family in an emotional scene where the queen promises an heir to the people. At night the oracle from Delphi is announced; Jocasta and then Laius, too, decide to accept the god's will. The first pageant shows already that more than Oedipus' tragedy is presented in this play, those of Jocasta and of the whole Theban race are foreshadowed here. The oracle mentioned a disaster for the city only, and its second part, Oedipus' incest and parricide are announced later, after the child's birth. Jocasta by giving up her vow of chastity has become a frenzied woman dominated by Venus. When she decides to have the baby killed she suggests that such oracles cannot come from

gods, and that maybe the real god is not yet known.

This is the very essence of Ghéon's approach, and by and by it will become more obvious below. In this play again as in Gide, the sphinx has the riddle that has to be solved through the spiritual progress of Oedipus. Eventually he will understand the whole meaning of his answer that he gave without consideration. Through the enigma of the sphinx Ghéon has expressed his reinterpretation of the myth, and he has significantly changed its contents.³ If in Hofmannsthal's play the enigma is not mentioned at all, it seems that Ghéon's is however, the first modern version that presents it in a different form. He does not present the sphinx episode itself but Oedipus reports his victory to Jocasta, reading to her the enigma written on a piece of parchment that the monster had given him:

Malheur bonheur, bonheur malheur, malheur sur
bonheur, bonheur sur malheur; ce qui croit com-
mencer finit et ce qui croit finir commence. Tout
est dans rien, rien est dans tout. J'entasse ambi-
tion, plaisir, envie, cruauté, richesse, vengeance.
J'ajoute et je soustrais amour et, tout étant mêlé,
je renonce. A moins que l'amour véritable ne
neige sur l'Olympe et la terre boira.

(Acte II, 7)

For Oedipus this is the very enigma of the world, and if nevertheless he gives a solution which is the right answer, it is without understanding it, similar to the hero of the traditional

³Cf. Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Encyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, s.v. Sphinx: "Der Rätselkampf besteht in der vorherrschenden Überlieferung nur in dem einen Rätsel der Sphinx, aber es fehlt nicht an Anzeichen dafür, dass die Alten erweiterte Auffassungen, wie sich solche bei der Beliebtheit des Rätselstreites mit Notwendigkeit ausbilden mussten."

version:

Cette énigme, image du monde, est incompréhensible
comme lui.
Rien à comprendre sur ce parchemin, rien à compren-
dre dans le monde ...
Si nous ne plaçons plus haut notre espoir,
Plus haut que la plus haute cime de montagne où
habitent les dieux,
Dans la source de l'amour même; un dieu qui
aimerait ...
(Acte II, 7)

The second part of his answer, the true solution, could only be the expression of a vague hope or of a sudden inspiration, for he himself ignores who this god of love is. Absorbed by his love for Jocasta he now forgets the enigma.⁴ The important change is that not "man", but "un dieu qui aimerait" is the solution.

When twenty years later the new monster, the plague devastates the country, Jocasta can only see "death" as the solution to its riddle (Acte III, 2). When, after the anagnorisis, Oedipus and Jocasta meet, their awareness of the injustice of the gods prevents them from a shameful repulsion from each other. For a short moment, the first time in their lives, mother and son are united. But Oedipus soon realizes that this is only an illusion, that his life, like the riddle, is absurd: "Comédie! comédie! ... voilà le vrai mot de l'énigme!" (III, 8) It is only when Eteocles and Polynices reject their parents that Jocasta leaves to commit suicide. Now all hope for Oedipus is gone, too; he blinds himself and, before leaving with Antigone, he curses his sons at what appears to be a more appropriate moment than in the Oedipus at Colonus.

⁴This scene is similar to the end of Péladan and Hofmannsthal's tragedies, and close to Cocteau's interpretation of the illusionary answer, too.

In the last part, the reinterpretation of the myth as mysteriously foreshadowed by previous allusions, is further developed, and a solution for all the riddles is announced. Ghéon was over sixty when he wrote this play which explains perhaps that his greatest sympathies have gone to this final part of Oedipus' life. It has become his most original contribution, though it is true that the events are not as strictly established by the myth itself as they are for the earlier parts. The situation is basically that of Euripides' Phoenissae, the war against Thebes and the death of Eteocles and Polynices but with an atmosphere closer to Sophocles' second play; Oedipus, reconciled with his destiny remains at the centre. The two Greek plays are harmoniously combined, and the unity of the work is strengthened by allusions to former events now seen in a new light. Oedipus and Antigone arrive at a fountain near Thebes, not far from the road where Laius was killed, it is the place where at the time of the plague the dead bodies were washed. Oedipus also recognizing it to be close to the former pedestal of the sphinx, says: "J'ai voulu reprendre la même route ... comme à vingt ans ... La route du secret" (IV, 2). He recalls the enigma of the sphinx but has forgotten the answer he gave her. This time however, he will come to understand her secret through the love of Antigone. The theme of the tragedy of the Theban race is taken up again when the death of his two sons is announced. In Sophocles a glorious future is promised to Athens, in Ghéon it becomes the hope for a new Thebes, which at the same time is an image of his own beloved country: it is France devastated by inner and outer conflicts that has to be rebuilt. Only love can achieve this, and Oedipus eventually understands the meaning of the solution to all the enigmas. The hope in a new god of love is confirmed by an inscription in the overturned column of the sphinx: "Au Dieu inconnu." By introducing this allusion to Saint Paul's altar of the unknown God

on the Areopagus in Athens,⁵ Ghéon has a justification for his promise of salvation to the Greek hero and his city. Oedipus recognizing the cursing of his sons to be his only voluntary crime, now assumes his responsibility for their death. He will bury them, while Creon, like the Athenians at Saint Paul's time, does not yet understand this new kind of life based on love, and the play concludes on Oedipus' and Antigone's departure: "Adieu pays! Veillez sur la nouvelle Thèbes, Dieu inconnu!" The twilight of the old gods, "le crépuscule des dieux," has come: a Christian version of the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides. In relation to Ghéon's involvement in the *Renouveau Catholique*, the reflexion of contemporary France that like Creon still rejects his message, is obvious.⁶

The simplicity of this pre-Christian Oedipus may be Ghéon's answer to the intellectual play of his friend, A. Gide, that appears shockingly modern and sophisticated in comparison. Both are characteristic expressions of their authors' outlook.

⁵Acts of the Apostles, 17, 23.

⁶That a Christian interpretation and dénouement is appropriate for the Oedipus myth appears in a medieval version, Gregorius auf dem Steine, by Hartmann von Aue. Gregorius also marries his mother whom he does not know, a reward for his liberation of the country from a monster, when the truth comes out he will expiate his crime for seventeen years by cruel self-imposed sufferings; a truly holy man now, he is afterwards elected Pope [cf. the modern version of this legend, Der Erwählte by Thomas Mann (1951)].

ALEXIS CURVERS : CE VIEIL OEDIPE

Just as the satyr play brought some relief to the Greek spectators after the tension of a tragic trilogy, this critical approach of a modern satyr play provides a good conclusion to the French Oedipus tragedies. Alexis Curvers, a Belgian writer,¹ presents his version as a burlesque literary satire, in the style of Aristophanes, where, following for the general structure Oedipus at Colonus, he expresses some of what he calls Sophocles' backthoughts, and introduces some other well known opinions on the Greek tragedy. It comprises a play within the play with the action presented on two levels, on the actual stage at the back and in the orchestra where the performance is planned and discussed. Old Sophocles has come to the theatre of Athens to find inspiration for a conclusion to his Oedipus Tyrannus, the end of which does not satisfy him. Both Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy, and Thalia, the muse of comedy, as well as a satyr, promise their help. Sophocles tries both approaches, and each muse in turn goes on stage to direct the action, Thalia even changing the tragic chorus of old citizens into handsome young men. But Sophocles can never really make up his mind and lets his characters decide whether it is a tragedy or a comedy. Here the same dichotomy appears; Oedipus and Antigone are the traditional tragic figures, and they consider it their duty not to disillusion the public and live up to their image. They are confronted with Theseus and Ismene who look

¹A. Curvers, (born in 1906), Ce vieil Oedipe; drame satyrique en quatre actes, en prose et en vers (Bruxelles: Editions de Visscher, 1947).

at Oedipus' tragedy with good common sense and try to settle this family scandal as discreetly as possible.

In a dialogue with her sister, Ismene explains what they should have done after the unfortunate discovery about their parents. She gives the solution that probably any modern European royal family would have chosen to keep up appearances. Its comic effect lies in the absolute contradiction of the traditional attitude, all impression of distance from the tragic character being destroyed by the practical-minded Ismene. First of all, Oedipus, she tells Antigone, should have stayed in Thebes:

On l'aurait installé dans le pavillon égyptien, au fond du parc. Là, à l'insu de tous, on l'aurait soigné, sa nourrice aurait veillé sur lui nuit et jour, il aurait appris la musique ou l'écriture des aveugles pour se désennuyer, serait devenu de première force au trictrac et aurait eu ses tisanes à heures fixes. Et toi, tu aurais inauguré des expositions et ouvert les bals de la cour ...

(II, 1)

Beside there was no need to inform the public: "Est-ce que ça ne pouvait pas se lessiver en famille?" Ismene could never understand why her mother committed suicide, and her father blinded himself, though she agrees, "dans la famille on a toujours eu le goût du drame" (II, 1). She had been so embarrassed at this "indecent" public appearance of her father with his bleeding eyes. And if only Antigone had not followed him, he would have stayed in Thebes. She can never accept her sister's argument that a god ordered her to go. However, these antiheroic simplifications proposed by Ismene, rather than presenting a solution to the tragic situation, become a parody of the contemporary bourgeois ideals for a most uneventful, secure, and honourable life.

The confrontation of Oedipus and Theseus, though just as "desacralizing", reveals a more serious underlying conflict of characters and outlooks. Oedipus, left alone for a short while, (an opportunity he never had in Sophocles' play), throws away his blind man's cane and his dark glasses to admire the Attic scenery. When Theseus unexpectedly arrives and is surprised to see him . run after a butterfly, he will confidentially explain to him:

Tu règues comme j'ai régné. Tu es comme moi un personnage en vue, de vaste renommée. Tu connais les nécessités du métier. Pour tout le monde tu es le successeur d'Hercule, et moi, pour tout le monde, je suis aveugle. A mesure que guérissaient mes yeux, blessés par les agrafes d'or de Jocaste, j'ai senti que les gens criaient à la mystification si je les détrompais sur ma cécité glorieuse. Ils tiennent à mon drame qui les fait frissonner, version sublime de leurs existences médiocres. Antigone, tiens: j'ai surtout fait ça pour elle. La pauvre enfant est possédée d'un tel besoin de dévouement que, moi retrouvant mes yeux, elle perdait sa raison de vivre.

(II, 4)

They almost come to quarrel over who can boast of more adventures and "histoires de famille", but Theseus does not really understand Oedipus' attitude in spite of his experience with Phaedra and Hippolytus, -"des compliqués de ton genre" (II, 4). He appears to be the only character in the play who is never ridiculed. Opposing Oedipus' tragic views, he shows him how everything could be seen from a different perspective, which though here exaggerated in a play of words echoing those of Oedipus is the basic theme of this work: tragic or not, it all depends on how you look at it.

Oedipe: Tout m'a toujours été contraire: je souhaitais de mourir, on me maintient en vie; de fuir Thèbes, on m'y garde; de m'y accomoder, on m'en expulse. Maintenant que je me plais en Attique, la Béotie ne peut plus se passer de moi.

Thésée: N'est-ce pas ton humeur plutôt qui
 s'obstine à contrarier le destin?
 On te sauve la vie, tu te crèves
 les yeux; on te retient, tu veux fuir;
 on se lasse, tu reprends goût. Quand
 Thèbes se resouvient, Athènes seule
 te séduit.

(II, 4)

Theseus obviously has not too many sympathies for the old grumbler, but faithful to his ideals, he fulfils his role of defender of justice, and refuses to participate in Ismene's and Creon's strategy to lure Oedipus back to Thebes. Oedipus, however believing that he was again the victim of necessity, has given in himself, looking forward to picking melons in his garden; and Antigone taken away from her father enjoys these first moments of independence.

If until now most of the dialogues had been in prose, with the arrival of Polynices follows a very traditional scene in alexandrines, imitating the French classics, only interrupted by Ismene's down-to-earth remarks (III, 12). A final "demystification" is given by Oedipus himself in a monologue overheard by his daughters, Theseus, and the chorus. For once he appears to be very lucid about his own character, and agrees that with some good will and tact he could have settled all his problems and maintained friendly relationships with everybody. But how boring such a life would have been! As an intruder in the family and the city he never felt fully recognized, but his technique of drawing everybody's attention to him was very simple:

En somme, mon procédé est simple: Je dis non. Quoi qu'on me propose, qu'on me demande, qu'on me déconseille, qu'on m'explique, ma réponse est: non. Non, non, non, non. Avec ce petit mot-là, si on n'est pas maître du monde, du moins on l'empêche de tourner.

(IV, 1)

Such a confession does not leave any illusions, and after Oedipus' disappearance, the play ends on commonplace remarks that could be heard at any funeral: "Nous garderons tous la mémoire d'une vie si bien remplie. Une belle vie, en somme". - "Oui, c'est ce qu'on dit toujours après les enterrements" (IV, 4).

But Curvers' satire goes beyond the Greek play. He admits in a prefatory note to having borrowed many passages from French poets, which is responsible for an extreme variety in language, from Sophocles, through French classical tragedy and comedy, to contemporary everyday language. Recalling the love subplots in earlier French versions, he has Théodule, a citizen from Colonus (and member of the chorus) propose to Antigone in a bourgeois-pastoral love song. She, of course, refuses, "Les Labdacides n'admettront pas la mésalliance!" (II, 2)

So much for the action on the back of the stage. Throughout the play discussions on drama are continued in the orchestra, especially when a young 20th century philologist suddenly enters, interrupting the chorus: "Vous n'êtes pas d'accord avec Wilamowitz!" (II, 10). The satire of modern literary criticism becomes obvious when speaking of Sophocles' tragedies he has to admit:

Je ne les ai jamais lues. Je n'ai pas de temps à perdre. Songez qu'il m'a fallu recenser le Laurentianus et le Vaticanus, conférer les scolies, départager les commentateurs allemands, mettre à jour l'apparat critique et rédiger ma préface en latin.

(II, 10)

But by an improvised paeon on Attica Sophocles will convert the scholar to poetry, who later will also express his admiration for another intruder, Jean Racine. This young poet is just writing on the Theban family, too, in a play called La Thébaïde, and he is thus able to give a judicious criticism of Corneille's Oedipe. In spite of his enthusiasm for Sophocles' genius he prefers Euripides' more human scepticism, and here he seems to express Curvers'

underlying attitude toward the play.

Allusions to contemporary Oedipus interpretations appear in a few remarks. Oedipus must have heard of Freudian theories when he tries to understand the conflict with his sons by recalling his jealousy when Jocasta and "uncle" Creon gave all their attention to the little brothers. Other paradoxical details may be influenced by Gide's tragedy, but he comes closer to Thésée by opposing the two heroes. It is true that this is a natural development of the myth, especially as Theseus' life is well known. Corneille had introduced him in his play, but as lover only, and Gide's hero is surprised that no one has noticed his important meeting with Oedipe² which would make the episode there its first literary treatment. Though Curvers wrote his play in March-April 1943³, while Gide's work was published in 1946, he may have introduced some passages later, as his play was performed and published in 1947 only. But as the most striking resemblance is in the opposition of Oedipus and Theseus, and in the importance given to the ideas of the King of Athens, Curvers may simply have known of the project of Gide who for a long time had been planning to write a Thésée.⁴ This is quite plausible as, at the beginning of war, Gide spent a year at "La Messuguière" (near Cabris) in the South of France, the house of a friend, where A. Curvers, had also taken refuge, with his wife, Marie Delcourt.⁵ She is, as it is interesting to notice, a remarkable Hellenist, perhaps the best informed person on the Oedipus myth, and at that she must have been working on her excellent study, Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant (1944) where the

²Thésée, p. 115.

³Cf. date marked at the end of the play, p. 140.

⁴Cf. see above p. 111.

⁵Cf. Tony Bourg, "Une amitié franco-luxembourgeoise, André Gide et Madame Mayrisch", in Colpach (Luxembourg: V. Buck, 1957), p. 90.

approach is mainly based on folklore studies.⁶

Curvers' play is above all an intellectual game and should be best enjoyed by those poets and critics involved in the interpretation of Sophocles' work. It is obvious that such a treatment can never appeal to a large audience who would not share the same background on Oedipus studies and interpretations. Literary satire is certainly not the most characteristic approach of our time to Greek drama, it is rather its very tragic nature that appeals to our century. Reinterpretation of classical myths in contemporary French drama is often associated with existentialism, and it may be surprising that no such approach has been taken to Oedipus. It is true that the very essence of this myth is hardly reconcilable with a philosophy based on the affirmation of man's freedom and full responsibility of action. However, two of the most famous contemporary French writers, A. Camus and J. Anouilh, have referred to Oedipus, and by comparing him with heroes of their works have shown their attitude toward him.

Camus, whose philosophy of the absurd is related to existentialism, compared Oedipus with another mythical figure, Sisyphus,⁷ the very representative of the absurd for him. The tragedy for both of them begins only when they become conscious of their situation. Such a distinction seems obvious, but on the other hand it explains the hesitation we cannot avoid when we call Péladan or Hofmannsthal's plays tragedies, or in a different sense, the Oedipus at Colonus plays where a reconciliation is achieved and the absurdity resolved. Such a solution would not be possible for Camus as appears in this passage:

⁶ see above, p. 2.

⁷ Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l'absurde (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).

Ainsi Oedipe obéit d'abord au destin, sans le savoir. A partir du moment où il sait, sa tragédie commence. Mais dans le même instant, aveugle et désespéré, il reconnaît que le seul lien qui le rattache au monde, c'est la main fraîche d'une jeune fille. Une parole démesurée retentit alors: "Malgré tant d'épreuves, mon âge avancé et la grandeur de mon âme me font juger que tout est bien". L'Oedipe de Sophocle, comme le Kirilov de Dostoïevsky, donne ainsi la formule de la victoire absurde. La sagesse antique rejoint l'héroïsme moderne.⁸

It would be difficult to find enough dramatic material for renewing a tragedy in which, by such an approach, any action or hope for change is by definition excluded. Thus an absurd dramatic treatment of Oedipus has not been attempted, and Jean Anouilh, too, preferred the character of Antigone, who decides her destiny herself, for a play that shows the absurdity of the human will.⁹ Creon accusing her of stubbornness compares her attitude to what he calls Oedipus' pride (orgueil),¹⁰ this unflinching quest for truth that she passionately defends:

Comme mon père, oui! Nous sommes de ceux qui posent les questions jusqu'au bout. Jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste vraiment plus la plus petite chance d'espoir vivante, la plus petite chance d'espoir à étrangler. Nous sommes de ceux qui lui sautent dessus quand ils le rencontrent, votre espoir, votre cher espoir, votre sale espoir.¹¹

To know the absurdity of one's hopeless situation is better than to enjoy a mediocre, illusionary happiness, and only the full recognition of his "crimes", which he knew nobody could ever take away from him, gave Oedipus his beautiful serenity at the end.

⁸ Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l'absurde, p. 72.

⁹ Antigone (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1947); it was first performed in Paris, 4 February 1944.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 102.

T. S. ELIOT: THE ELDER STATESMAN¹

We need to remind ourselves that, as Europe is a whole . . . , so European literature is a whole, the several members of which cannot flourish, if the same blood-stream does not circulate throughout the whole body. The blood-stream of European literature is Latin and Greek - not as two systems of circulation, but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced.²

It is not surprising that the author of these lines showed in his own works the importance of tradition and continuity in literature, and based four of his plays on Greek myth. His purpose is not merely a revival of the old tragedies for a contemporary audience,³ they serve him as point of departure for his own works on modern society. The use of myth is, as he says in relation to the method of James Joyce in Ulysses: "it is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history".⁴

¹London: Faber and Faber, 1958; page references here are given to Collected Plays (London: Faber and Faber, 1962).

²T. S. Eliot, "What is a Classic?" in On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 69-70.

³For his second play, The Cocktail Party, he had concealed his source, the Alcestis of Euripides, so well that nobody recognized it until he revealed it himself; cf. T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", in On Poetry and Poets, op. cit., p. 84

⁴T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", in Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 123.

Eliot went back to Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus for the basic theme of The Elder Statesman, which turned out to be his last play, too. But already, in 1938, this tragedy had appealed to him; he mentioned it as providing one way of completing his earlier play, The Family Reunion.⁵

As in all his plays, Eliot here, too, presents the conflict from a Christian perspective, and the theme of the Oedipus at Colonus seems particularly appropriate for this,⁶ and it is also interesting to see this last play as a conclusion to his dramatic work. Its relation to the Greek tragedy is often mentioned, but The Elder Statesman should here be considered more closely in the context of Oedipus reinterpretations.

Unlike all the other works on this myth seen so far, there is no conspicuous relation to the Greek story in names or places. The characters, the environment, as well as the plot itself, fit perfectly into a contemporary (English) society. Nevertheless the parallels with the Greek tragedy are obvious: old Lord Claverton, an elder statesman, leaves with his daughter Monica (Antigone) for a rest cure, his past life is recalled, he meets with his son Michael (Polynices), and finally at peace with himself, he goes for a walk and dies. Except for a slightly strange end, Monica and Charles instinctively knowing that Lord Claverton will not return from his walk, but will die under the beech tree, there is nothing mythic or extraordinary presented or mentioned in this play. This is extremely simplified, and indeed many other similarities appear,

⁵Cf. Letter to E. Martin Browne, 19 March 1938, in E. Martin Browne, The Making of Eliot's Plays (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), p. 107.

⁶Ghéon's last act is very explicitly based on Christian ideas, and even in non-Christian reinterpretations, like Pannwitz' Die Befreiung des Oidipus, and Gide's Thésée, the religious character is stressed, each one interpreting in his way the miraculous and holy end of Oedipus' life.

but their presentation and function is changed beyond a merely modern decor. To understand Eliot's approach it is very important to notice that this play is not preceded by an Oedipus Tyrannus, nor are these events presupposed, known or summarized in a prologue. Instead of going into exile Lord Claverton is simply about to retire for reasons of health; there is no allusion to the shock of a former anagnorisis.⁷ In that sense he is closer to Oedipus in the opening scene of Sophocles' first tragedy. In spite of presenting a late moment of Oedipus' life, Eliot has actually combined the themes of the two tragedies; the revelation of less glorious episodes in his brilliant career corresponds to the Oedipus Tyrannus, while Claverton's recovery of his peace of mind is similar to the Oedipus at Colonus. Both aspects are closely linked and represented by different characters around Claverton. His "ghosts", Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, by revealing past events in Act I and II recall the first tragedy, while his daughter accompanying him to the convalescent home, and the debate with his son correspond to the second play. Only at the end do the two elements come to a final reconciliation.

This double action is easily recognizable in the first act where the mood of the opening scene is very different from that of the old blind Oedipus in exile arriving with Antigone at Colonus. The trivial conversation of the two lovers, Monica and Charles Hemington, coming back from a "shopping expedition" is much rather the setting for a comedy on present-day society. The allusions to Lord Claverton echo some of the characteristics of the old Oedipus: "his terror of being alone," and "his fear of being exposed to strangers" (pp. 299, 300). These are reasons for Monica to accompany her father rather than stay with her fiancé, but here his fears are not due to his blindness, nor to the shame of his former crimes, they mainly reflect the double nature of

⁷ There are however allusions to some secret mistake which would account for his leaving politics to take a job in the City; cf. pp. 310, 331.

his personality which is alluded to in other remarks. Thus Charles doubts whether this public figure who retired in glory has any "private self to preserve" (p. 300), while Lord Claverton says of himself:

No, I've not the slightest longing for the life I've left -
Only fear of the emptiness before me.
(p. 302)

and he counts himself among "the failed successes, the successful failures, / Who occupy positions that other men covet" (p. 303). Just after he has called himself a ghost, another ghost from his past arrives: the mysterious gentleman from Central America, Señor Gomez. The long private conversation of the two men where Lord Claverton is never very sure what his interlocutor really wants, creates a somehow threatening atmosphere of police inquiry through which the past is relentlessly revealed. Gomez turns out to be his one-time college friend from Oxford, a scholarship boy, whom he had helped and who had admired him. It appears that both had become involved in some obscure business, but Gomez alone was caught and sent to prison, and afterwards he left for England.

This character and his function in relation to the myth is an original creation of Eliot. The first act which significantly takes place before the departure for Badgeley Court (i. e. Colonus), is his reinterpretation of Oedipus' anagnorisis, where many themes, rather than actions correspond to the Oedipus Tyrannus. The plague has become Claverton's own disease, and it appears to be as much psychic as physical. The discussion with Gomez is an entirely new approach to Oedipus' recognition of his identity, but it is a complete inversion that destroys any heroic image of Claverton. Compared to Oedipus who, pushed by an inexorable passion for truth, insists on hearing the shepherd's testimony in spite of Jocasta's warning, this modern hero is a coward. He has been secretly aware of his guilt but always tried to forget it,

and is now against his will pushed to re-examine his life. The problem of self-knowledge and changing identity is raised. Gomez, alias Culverwell, had to take another name by necessity and agrees that it had an influence on his personality. But his friend should understand this, for he, too has changed name, even twice, from plain Dick Ferry in Oxford to Mr. Richard Claverton-Ferry, and finally Lord Claverton (p. 305). Though in the myth Oedipus keeps his name "Swollen Foot", his social position changed from exposed baby to victor over the sphinx, and King of Thebes.⁸

For Eliot the importance of names was such that at one time he intended to call the play "The Rest Cure, or alternatively, The Man Who Changed His Name".⁹ The theme of the frequent changing of names is closely linked to the recurrent metaphor of the actor.¹⁰ Lord Claverton is simply playing a role as Gomez also tells him:

The worst kind of failure, in my opinion,
Is the man who has to keep on pretending to himself
That he's a success - the man who in the morning
Has to make up his face before he looks in the mirror.

(p. 312)

But Gomez has something else to remind him of, "The night you ran over the old man in the road" (p. 312). Though it later turns out that the old man, the equivalent to Laius, had died

⁸Though Eliot has not taken the names of the myth, in one of the characters the original name is easily recognized: Charles Hemington is obviously Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's lover.

⁹E. M. Browne, op. cit., p. 314.

¹⁰Cf. Kurt Schlüter, Der Mensch als Schauspieler: Studie zur Deutung von T. S. Eliots Gesellschaftsdramen, 2nd ed. (Bonn: H. Bouvier & Co., 1966) pp. 52-88.

a natural death before he was run over, the idea of fault and guilt is there nevertheless, for Claverton had not even had the courage to stop his car. Gomez' role is clearly that of an Erinyes, or bad conscience, or even subconsciousness, repressed as long as Claverton had been absorbed by his work. But now, retired, he has time to think and will not be able to get rid of his "ghost" as Gomez promises before he leaves. This witness of a past that seemed completely buried is also the personification of Claverton's alter ego, and in some respects Gomez is closer to the Oedipus of the legend. Both are of obscure origin, and while Gomez-Culverwell has been lucky to get a scholarship to Oxford, Oedipus happens to be brought up as the son of King Polybus; afterwards both leave their country and become leading figures in a new place by different, yet in each case "unlawful" methods.¹¹ Such parallels cannot be pushed too far, Gomez' function is above all to achieve the first step of Claverton's self-recognition, the one corresponding to Oedipus' murder of Laius. But compared with the Greek hero Claverton's faults are far less spectacular, and yet he is afraid of solitude and the recalling of further memories.

This anti-heroic mood is very strong in the second act, too. By its setting, the terrace of Badgeley Court, it reflects Colonus, but on the other hand, it is still part of the Oedipus Tyrannus, and brings about the second step of the anagnorisis. The first scene is an ironic inversion of the opening of the Oedipus at Colonus. Instead of Oedipus and Antigone in exile arriving in an unknown place, father and daughter are here comfortably established in this expensive convalescent home. In Sophocles the chorus of citizens of Colonus disturbed their rest in the sanctuary, and was horrified to hear that the old man was Oedipus who had become famous for

¹¹ Oedipus was unaware of his crime, while Gomez has a similar justification for his methods, too: they do not contradict in any way the standards of morality of his new country (p. 306).

his crimes. In Badgeley Court it is also difficult to find a quiet spot away from the chatty matron and the guest who, recognizing the great Lord Claverton, are very keen to talk to him. Here his second "ghost" and Erinys whom he cannot escape appears: Mrs. Carghill. She, too, has changed names twice: before her marriage she had first been Maisie Batterson, then became Maisie Mountjoy on stage at the time he knew her. Again old memories are revived which Lord Claverton would prefer to leave buried; he had been her first lover but his father had made it worthwhile for both not to marry. Unlike him she enjoys recalling their love, and though her talk appears to be mostly silly and embarrassing for Lord Claverton she is a real Erinys, too:

I've followed your progress year by year, Richard.
 And although it's true that our acquaintance was brief,
 Our relations were intense enough, I think,
 To have given me one or two insights into you.
 No, Richard, don't imagine that I'm still in love with you;
 And you needn't think I idolise your memory.
 It's simply that I feel that we belong together ...
 Now, don't get alarmed. But you touched my soul -
 Pawed it, perhaps, and the touch still lingers.
 And I've touched yours.
 It's frightening to think that we're still together
 And more frightening to think that we may always be together.

(p. 325)

Just as the parricide, the incest theme, too, is altered: the enormous but involuntary crime is reduced to a rather mean love affair, a piece of gossip on public figures. Oedipus was a victim of the gods, Lord Claverton's faults are his own and if they are small in comparison to those of the myth, his greatness has been pure illusion, too; he is a hollow man (p. 321),¹² who fits

¹²Cf. The Hollow Men (1925), one of Eliot's best known poems, in T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 75-80.

perfectly in a milieu ironically presented as social comedy. He is now in their power. If his "ghosts" reveal their secrets he will be ridiculed and lose his face in society. Maybe an action would be brought against him, but never would he become a tragic hero.

Neither the meeting with Theseus nor that with Creon have an equivalent in Eliot's play, but the confrontation with his son Michael-Polynices comes to play a decisive role in Claverton's spiritual progress. As the conflict of generations is a problem of all times, the modernization was not too difficult. Instead of asking a blessing for war against his own brother, Michael here asks for money, another example of how the heroic aspects of the myth are ironically changed into problems of everyday-life in the 20th century. Michael's main handicap is to have a famous father whose ideas he does not share, and yet always be judged accordingly: "'Not what we expected from the son of your father'" (p. 330), is the usual reaction to his achievements. The conflict in many ways resembles the earlier one with Gomez:

I simply want to leave a life of my own,
According to my own ideas of good and bad,
Of right and wrong. I want to go far away
To some country where no one has heard the name of
Claverton;
Or where, if I took a different name - and I might
choose to -
No one would know or care what my name had been.

(p. 331)

But as the tragedy of Oedipus had only been part of the tragedy of the Theban race, so here, too, it involves much more than Lord Claverton's own life. It is continued in his family, and through Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, it also becomes the disease of a whole society. And because it is not a disaster like the sphinx or the plague, nobody objects to its perpetuation. In one sense Michael takes after Gomez, and Claverton promises to help him

start a business somewhere abroad, just as he had done for his former friend. But the son also resembles his father, who, aware of this, suspects him of manslaughter and trouble with women (pp. 327, 332). It is difficult for modern interpreters to understand Oedipus' cursing of his son, immediately followed by his peaceful death. But instead of an impossible reconciliation Eliot makes his confrontation an important step in Claverton's self-recognition. Gomez and Mrs. Carghill have recalled him who he really is behind the mask and costume of the famous public figure, but only through the interview with his son does he come to understand that Michael's problem is his own:

What I want to escape from
 Is myself, is the past. But what a coward I am,
 To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!
 A few minutes ago I was pleading with Michael
 Not to try to escape from his own past failures:
 I said I knew from experience. Do I understand the
 meaning
 Of the lesson I would teach? Come! I'll start to learn
 again.
 Michael and I shall go to school together. (p. 337)

Like Oedipus he has come to terms with himself to achieve a final recognition before he can die in peace. This is the theme of the third act where through Eliot's Christian and unheroic view all the spectacular and dramatic aspects of the myth disappear:

There are many things not crimes, Monica,
 Beyond anything of which the law takes cognisance:
 Temporary failures, irreflective aberrations,
 Reckless surrenders, unexplainable impulses,
 Moments we regret in the very next moment,
 Episodes we try to conceal from the world.

(p. 340)

In a similar way the extraordinary and unique character of the sudden revelation of the Oedipus Tyrannus has lost all its

dramatic power. He admits that the spectres from the past have always been with him, but only now, gradually and through the presence of Gomez and Mrs. Carghill he has been able to recognize and accept them, just as Oedipus had come after a moment of passionate rage and self-mutilation, to understand the newly discovered truth. He spontaneously had made a public confession, and because this sharing of his guilty secrets with somebody sympathizing had never been possible for Lord Claverton, he had not come to a full understanding of himself. What he could not tell his wife, for there had never been love in his marriage, he now confesses for the first time to Monica and Charles:

It's harder to confess the sin that no one believes in
 Than the crime that everyone can appreciate.
 For the crime is in relation to the law,
 And the sin is in relation to the sinner.
 What has made the difference in the last five minutes
 Is not the heinousness of my misdeeds
 But the fact of my confession ...

(p. 345)

Sin instead of crime, confession helping self-recognition, such is Eliot's Christian view on Oedipus. And just as Ghéon had announced a final solution by a god of love, here, too, Claverton's liberation from his ghosts is achieved through his sudden illumination of what love is. Feeling reconciled with everybody through this love, Lord Claverton leaves for a walk alone, and will die under a beech tree. This tree is associated with Eliot's symbolic use of the garden as a place of spiritual harmony. Charles and Monica understand that their father will not come back, and Charles' description of Claverton's disappearance is Eliot's imagery for Oedipus' miraculous death:

He's a very different man from the man he used to be.
 It's as if he had passed through some door unseen by us
 And had turned and was looking back at us
 With a glance of farewell.

(p. 354)

The conclusion is not only Claverton's union with god through love, he does not, like Oedipus, leave behind a lamenting daughter. Divine love in death is completed by the human love of Charles and Monica, this is the new meaning of Oedipus' blessing, which gives hope for an eventual reconciliation with Michael who has left with Gomez.

Eliot's reinterpretation of Oedipus is the most radically new treatment, and this not so much by the introduction of the subplot of Monica and Charles,¹³ or the Christian approach that other 20th century writers had taken before him. But here for the first time there is never an impression of anachronism, the contemporary setting is entirely consistent with the action, even the "ghosts", these modern Erinyes, are very plausible characters, and yet their symbolic meaning is obvious.¹⁴ The language, too, has a rhythm close to natural speech; one of Eliot's major concerns in his plays was indeed to find a form of versification suitable to this contemporary setting.

The defect of the play is probably a lack of dramatic tension, especially after the revelations of Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. But this was also true for the Oedipus at Colonus, which is, rather than a dramatic conflict, a confrontation of outlooks, and often lyrical in character where inevitably the attitude of the author toward the hero is as important as the action itself.

¹³ An 18th century version, the Oedipus opera by François Nicolas Guillard, had also shifted part of the interest to the love of Polynices and the daughter of Theseus.

¹⁴ In his first play, The Family Reunion, the appearance of the Furies did not fit into the modern setting. "They never succeed in being either Greek goddesses or modern spooks. But their failure is merely a symptom of the failure to adjust the ancient with the modern." "Poetry and Drama," in On Poetry and Poets, op. cit., p. 84.

One may object that such an interpretation, and especially the nature of Claverton's "crimes" can no longer be seen as an adaptation of the Greek tragedy. If the essence of the myth is parricide and incest, then obviously this is not more than a parody, but if it is search for self-knowledge and truth, and illustrates the problem of appearance and reality, then it is an authentic Oedipus interpretation. Like the hero of the myth, Claverton's failings were like Oedipus' crimes, though very different in nature, beyond human law;¹⁵ only God can absolve him of his sins, and this corresponds to Oedipus' purification in the sanctuary of Colonus. By transforming his Oedipus into a statesman, Eliot has also taken up, in his own way, the political aspect of the myth.¹⁶ Instead of a benevolent and beloved king who unwittingly committed scandalous crimes, the elder statesman was deceiving himself, and had never been as glorious a figure as he pretended to be. He is not a victim of destiny, he is himself responsible for his sins in which there is nothing absurd, and therefore a reconciliation can be achieved at the end. As the heroic character of the tragedy has disappeared, he comes much closer to a 20th century audience in this atmosphere often bordering on light comedy.

¹⁵ See quotation above p. 148 : "There are many things not crimes ..."

¹⁶ Cf. M. Delcourt (see above, p. 2) for whom the myth is a conglomeration of episodes symbolizing the conquest of power.

CONCLUSION

It may be surprising that T.S. Eliot's play is the only English reinterpretation of Oedipus in this century, and that no American writer at all has been attracted by the myth.¹ The Ascent of F 6 by W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood² could to some extent be called an Oedipus play. It is a dramatic version of Freudian theories combined with the authors' radical political views, and in spite of obvious echoes from the traditional Oedipus story, in particular the dragon as equivalent to the sphinx, and the mother as prize for the victory, it can hardly be considered as part of the literary tradition of the myth.

If the most famous reinterpretations of classical themes in this century occur in French, German, and English literature, a few works on mythic themes can be found in other countries, too.³ There is a Spanish version by J.M. Péman, Edipo,⁴ which stays relatively close to Sophocles but tries to give a Christian

¹W.B. Yeats' translation of Sophocles' King Oedipus (London; 1928), first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1926, should be mentioned here as instead of scholarly accuracy the emotional impact on a twentieth century audience is stressed; in his preface Yeats insists that this is a version for the stage, designed to be spoken, which justifies his, at times, very free rendering of Sophocles; a few years later he also translated Sophocles' King Oedipus at Colonus, in Collected Plays (London: 1934).

²London: Faber and Faber, 1936.

³It is however striking that Italian literature does not seem to have an Oedipus interpretation in this century.

⁴Madrid: Escelicer, 1953.

interpretation by equating oracles and fate to Providence.

The Dutch play, Oidipoes en zijn moeder,⁵ by Max Croiset, is a very interesting reinterpretation. As the title indicates, the emphasis is on the relation of Jocasta and her son, and here the influence of Freud is obvious. But just as revealing are Oedipus' discussions with Apollo where the conflict of fate and free will appears: Oedipus pretends to fulfil divine orders but actually decides all by himself, and thus aware of what he is doing he commits his crimes.

It seems difficult to see any common trend in the large variety of Oedipus interpretations throughout the ages. For the recent works, the revival of tragedy at the end of the last century, mainly through Nietzsche and the new interest in stage performances of the ancient works led to the plays by Péladan, Hofmannsthal, and Pannwitz. Gide, in spite of striking modernizations, stays closer to the classic French adaptations; the emphasis has shifted from the Dionysian vitality to a more purely ethic approach, and the questioning of religious institutions recalls Voltaire's tragedy. Sceptical, but in a different way, is also J. Cocteau's attitude to the gods in La Machine infernale where fantasy and echoes from modern psychology hide the underlying awareness of tragedy. A more optimistic humour is expressed through Curvers' satyr-play which ridicules poetic and scholarly interpretations, and tries to ignore the tragedy of Oedipus' destiny.

Instead of exposing the conflicts of the intellectuals of their time, as Gide has done, Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, and Henri Ghéon took both Shakespeare and the medieval mystery and legend plays as their models, and addressed the people at large. The theme of rebellion is here changed into a Christian

⁵Graveland: De Driehoek, 1950.

message of love which puts these plays in relation with the revival of religious drama between the wars. This approach is taken up by T. S. Eliot, but here it is put in the context of contemporary upper class society, and for the first time the mythic background has completely disappeared.

Sophocles was the model for the neo-classic Oedipus tragedies. The aim of these playwrights, in particular Corneille, Dryden and Voltaire, was above all the imitation of a great work, and even by introducing their sub-plots they not only tried to adapt the tragedy to their time, but also to improve on the original. This attitude of rivalry can hardly be seen in the recent interpretations where actually the action very often does not follow that of Sophocles. The interest in a traditional kind of dramatic perfection has largely given way to an emphasis on attitudes and ideas, on the myth and character of Oedipus rather than on that most dramatic, particular moment of the Oedipus Tyrannus. The action in many recent works goes beyond that of Sophocles' tragedies. Péladan was the first to include the murder of Laius and the victory over the sphinx, an episode taken up in many later adaptations and for various reasons as has been seen. By concentrating on the earlier events of Oedipus' life some plays put more emphasis on his relation with Jocasta and echo the famous theories of psychoanalysis on this myth. But on the whole this influence is not predominant, especially as it is ignored in the Oedipus at Colonus treatments. Indeed with Pannwitz, Curvers, Eliot, and the last act of Ghéon's tragedy, attention has again been drawn to the second of Sophocles' Oedipus plays, which had been largely neglected because of its undramatic, lyrical character. But it allows more than any other part of the myth the possibility for very different conclusive attitudes toward Oedipus and his destiny.

The sub-plots and the love intrigues of the 17th and 18th century have disappeared, and the new tendency to oppose Oedipus

to another character, such as Creon in Hofmannsthal's and Gide's tragedies, or by the creation of a new character, like Eliot's Gomez, shows again that not only the plot but a confrontation of attitudes has attracted most contemporary writers to this myth. This led to non-dramatic treatments with Gide's Thésée and Pannwitz' "Tiresias" where Oedipus' destiny is seen through the eyes of another character of the myth which allowed the authors even better to take a very personal perspective.

Throughout the ages the destiny of Oedipus has fascinated the Western world; all the main facts were contained in the structure of the ancient myth, but each writer discovered them anew from his own standpoint. To follow Oedipus from ancient Greece to the present-day reveals characteristic attitudes of many ages, a variety of approaches to Antiquity and tragedy, literary tastes, as well as many personal attitudes to Oedipus' destiny, religious and political developments in many European countries.

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